

## Preserving the Elementary Music Experience

The March 2015 thirtieth anniversary of Music in Our Schools Month was a busy and very encouraging experiencing for me. I attended several local school concerts, sat in on a fifth grade guitar ensemble, sang along with a great high school choir, heard some wonderful middle school and high school jazz ensembles, visited with twelve different Missouri Representatives and Senators, participated with Sandy Collins (MMEA, MIOSM Chair) on a radio interview hosted by the Radio Arts Foundation, witnessed some remarkable teaching and learning in many clinic situations and hosted a concert here at UMSL in celebration of MIOSM. Music in Our Schools Month is an easy advocacy tool to celebrate and spread the good news about music education across our state. I hope we continue to expand on the possibilities that this focus month allows.

I must share an idea that I think defines MIOSM and is a tremendous advocacy event. Shannon Crepps, Director of Bands at Saeger Middle School in the Francis Howell School District, puts together a community band that includes students, Saeger Middle band alumni, parents, teachers, administrators and community members. They have five rehearsals beginning in the spring semester and give a concert in March in celebration of MIOSM. The participation is impressive and they sound terrific! I have attended for the last two years and have walked away impressed each time. This band brings together musicians of different ability levels, ages and backgrounds, where professionals are sitting next to students who have been playing for two years. Everyone is having fun making wonderful music. There are administrators and teachers of other subject areas in both the band and audience. District Administrators attend in support of this music education event. There are entire families and several generations of the same family participating. They do all of this for the love and enjoyment of music. This is testimony to the power of music and the continued lifelong participation in music. BRAVA, Shannon Crepps!

The focus of this issue is “Music is Elementary.” I would like to emphasize the fundamental role that music instruction in our elementary schools plays in the development of children and lifelong music participants. I also would like to share some insight into some trends and concerns that I have witnessed and read about.

The experiences that children have in the elementary school music program are not only significant for students in building musical competence, but they are also paramount in building music confidence. If we are ever going to create a large population of people in society who sing, play and enjoy music, then we must begin when children are very young. Music in early childhood develops abilities and sensitivities that enrich the everyday life of all people.

I am concerned that amount of instruction at these early grade levels is not what we would like to see. In a recent study conducted by the National Core Arts Standards, student contact time with elementary music across the nation revealed that only 5% of schools offer music every day, 10% offer music 3 or 4 times per week, 78% or the vast majority offer music once or twice per week and 7% offer music less than once a week.

The Opportunity-To-Learn Standard for Music Instruction, published by NAFME states that: #5) *Every student should receive general music instruction each week for at least ninety minutes, excluding time devoted to elective instrumental or choral instruction.* This goes on to state that

*#6) Instruction by music specialist is provided in periods of not less than twenty minutes nor more than thirty minutes in grades 1 and 2 and in periods of not less than twenty five minutes or more than forty-five minutes in grades 3 through 6.*

For many students, fifth grade will be the culminating year of musical education unless classroom music is required in the middle school. Currently under MISP 5 Resource Standards for music and art it is recommended that students in Junior High/Middle School have access to 1500 minutes each year. The concern here is *recommended*, not required.

Elementary music is frequently the first area in music education to be considered for elimination when the budget axe drops...that is unless someone discovers some unrelated reason for maintaining it. Without a quality elementary program, it is unlikely there would be a quality middle/junior high school or senior high school performing group after a few years. Would achievement in math and science continue to develop if eliminated from the elementary curriculum?

The U.S. Department of Education's 2009-2010 report on the state of arts education indicates that on average, full time elementary music specialists see 475 students each week, with 78 percent of these teachers seeing their student's only one or two times per week. These statistics reveal the tremendous teaching load that elementary music teachers negotiate while trying to provide foundational music experiences for children. If we expect the student population of our schools to be equipped to lead meaningful musical lives, then we must direct advocacy efforts toward preserving and enhancing elementary music opportunities. Elementary music programs are designed to serve all children.

An early mentor said to me "*Be sure to make the music class musical!!*" Avoid over-verbalization! (I am guilty of talking too much, so my friends tell me!) Do not have a class of just facts. We must not be the teacher that is so busy teaching that we do not let the students experience music.

My favorite part of observing student teachers is to witness the incredible work being done by elementary music teachers across our state. The creative and innovative means by which music concepts are taught and developed is inspirational. I am a better college band director for sitting in these marvelous learning labs for 50 minutes. My sincere thanks and admiration goes to all of Missouri's Elementary Music Teachers.

The application for performance for the 2016 MMEA In-Service/Workshop is open. Please visit [www.mmea.net](http://www.mmea.net) to make an application today.

The proposal form for clinic presentation at the 2016 MMEA In-Service/Workshop is also available by visiting [www.mmea.net](http://www.mmea.net). The theme for our 2016 conference is "***Creativity and Innovation.***" We are looking for innovative ideas and methods for enhancing learning in our ensembles and classrooms. If you have unique and creative procedures that enhance learning and musical skill development we want to hear from you.

Best wishes for the remainder of the school year. Have a great summer. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance to you or your programs.

Raessler, Kenneth R. 2003. *Aspiring to Excel*. GIA Publication, Inc.

Mikszá, Peter. 2013. *The Future of Music Education*. National Association for Music Education, MEJ, Vol. 99, No. 4.

NAfME. 2013. *Opportunity to Learn Standards. Standards for PreK – 6*. National Association for Music Education.