

National Hill Day 2016 and Student Centered Learning

What a Well-rounded Music Education Should Mean for All Students

“President Barack Obama passed a law in December that explicitly names music as a subject to be included in K-12 schools under the rubric of a well-rounded education. This designation will not only give music and arts educators leverage to prevent cutting these subjects from school budgets, but also access to Federal and State Title I and Title IV funds—specifically designated for disadvantaged students.” (Huffington Post)

On June 23, President Jeff Melsha, President-Elect Brian Reeves, Executive Director Paul Swofford, State NAFME-C President Dylan Fornshell, Taylor Bryson, MSM Editors Marty and Sally Hook and I participated in the National Association for Music Education annual Hill Day event. We were among approximately 300 music education advocates that met with their members of Congress and staff to discuss the recent ESSA re-authorization as it approaches the federal appropriation stages.

In order to actualize the vision created by ESSA, proper funding of these programs will maximize the law’s effectiveness, creating ample funding opportunities to increase the access of music education for all students, regardless of circumstance.

This year, NAFME Hill Day’s Legislative Agenda consisted of:

Support Access to Music Education for the Most Disadvantaged Students by Fully Funding Title I, Part A

- Title I, Part A programs, both school-wide and targeted, are now available to provide supplemental funds for a well-rounded education, including music.

Support Professional Development for Music Educators by Fully Funding Title I, Part A, Title II, Part A and Title IV, Part A and F

- These funds may be used to support professional development for music educators, as part of supporting a “Well-rounded Education.”

Support Access to Music Education as Part of a Well-Rounded Education by Fully Funding Title IV, Part A (SSAEG)

- This new formula-funded block-grant may be used in part to improve access to music education, and in turn, to support not only student success, but also the promotion of constructive student engagement, problem solving, and conflict resolution.

I share these talking points so you can also share these agenda items with your local policy makers and stay connected the realization of this historic law in your school and community.

Now is not the time to rest on our accomplishments! I encourage you to go to:

<http://www.nafme.org/take-action/grassroots-action-center/> follow the instructions provided and send the prepared letter to your local members of congress and ask them to support music education and fully fund SSAEG. ESSA and the positive benefits for music education are at the mercy of the appropriations committee. Senator Roy Blunt is a crucial member of this committee. We had an opportunity to visit with Sen. Blunt and discuss the importance of funding all of the aspects of the law listed above. I can tell you that he may need a little more encouragement.

I recently attended my niece's "White Coat" ceremony which is part of the induction to medical school. The keynote speaker's address focused on Patient Centered Care. As I listened I started to make connections with "Student Centered Learning" and I was reminded how this is at the heart of the new National Music Standards and what a well-rounded education means for our students.

As we begin the new school year we must consider how our curriculums will prepare our students for the world that they will inherit. 21st-century goals and competencies such as collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving is what our well-rounded students will need in order to thrive in today's world. Student-centered learning helps us realize those goals.

Traditional western music instruction is based on the teacher-centered approach to music education. In the teacher-centered model all repertoire and content is selected by the teacher which can result in a lack of interest by the students. I am reminded how fortunate we are as adults when attending a clinic session that does not meet our expectation we can just get up and leave. We discipline our students if they try to walk out of our classes.

Perhaps, because the teacher-centered system is what most of us have experienced, despite the fact that for more than a century people like John Dewey have spoken about the importance of progressive education, it takes a powerful and conscious act of will to step beyond it. The new standards can help guide our teaching to a more student-centered learning classroom. As all of us become more comfortable with these new standards and the understanding of their intentions it is important to know that they were written as part of a broad effort with our colleagues in the other arts and they have a student-centered focus that allows adaptation with each educator's teaching style and unique contributions.

As I select my repertoire for the first semester I plan to offer several pieces that I will let the students select for program content. We will read through the pieces that I have pre-selected and then let them vote on which ones we keep. The obvious concern is reading time. With so few rehearsals this decision will have to be made at the first couple of rehearsals. I hope we are able to make an informed decision. Another aspect I intend to try is to let section leaders bring to full rehearsals a list of rehearsal objectives that they feel they need to be address for one of the pieces we are programing. I am still working on the best and most time efficient means to accomplish this.

The realization of a well-rounded education for our students as it has been placed into law means our student are to be well versed in academics, music, art, social and physical skills. Achieving this goal means putting them at the center of the learning process. The new standards can help us obtain these goals. We need to reach an understanding of what our students' value and then find ways to engage them so we increase their motivation to learn, realize greater retention of knowledge and foster positive attitudes for music.