Music Matters

Music education has powerful and undeniable effects on student learning, achievement and lifelong success. Music represents the complexity and meaning of a culture, society and history. Learning music is a discipline that compels one to have a depth of understanding and offers an opportunity for advanced skill development. Building on the first release of Music Matters in 2011, the Arts Education Partnership has reviewed multiple research studies identified within ArtsEdSearch, the national clearinghouse of rigorous arts education research — to explore the importance of music on student learning outcomes. The body of evidence that identifies music’s positive impact on student success continues to grow and support the findings that music education:

1. Equips students with foundational skills to learn.
2. Bolsters student engagement and achievement in other academic subjects.
3. Develops the abilities essential for lifelong success.

Music education continues to illustrate the demonstrated effects of music education on student achievement. Early and sustained educational experiences in music deliver skills that can be effective predictors of long-term success in college, careers and citizenship. By investing in music instruction across the K–20 spectrum, education leaders, policymakers and practitioners can continue to provide students with the tools they need to learn, achieve in other academic subjects and develop the foundational capacities for lifelong success.

Acknowledgements

The Arts Education Partnership appreciates the generous support from the CMA Foundation and the NAMM Foundation for the production of this brief. AEP thanks the National Association for Music Education, The Mr. Holland’s Opus Foundation, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and VH1 Save The Music Foundation for serving as reviewers. AEP is grateful to Sandra Ruppert and past AEP staff for their leadership in the development of the original report.

About the Arts Education Partnership

AEP of Education Commission of the States is a national coalition of more than 100 education, arts, cultural, government, business and philanthropic organizations that was created in 1995 by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education. AEP maintains ArtsEdSearch. All studies cited in this brief are vetted by a panel of arts and music education experts, and curated in ArtsEdSearch.

Music education equips students with foundational skills to learn.

Music education helps students develop motor skills and cognitive capabilities, providing the tools needed for learning and content mastery. It also facilitates recall, retention, verbal sequencing and problem-solving in the following ways:

1. **Facilitates learning of other subjects.** Integrating arts or music into other academic subjects, such as science and history, continues to hold impressive effects on engagement, accomplishment and content recollection of that subject. To illustrate, students in a science class who were asked to translate what was being learned into another content (science) into another mode (musical lyrics) showed significant content retention and a positive attitude toward the science material.

2. **Advances math achievement.** Students who study music outperform their non-music peers in algebra, a course found to be critical in later academic achievement. Research demonstrates that students are better able to connect with their own cultural identity and could better connect with their non-musician peers.

3. **Cultivates critical thinking skills.** Linking skills, such as abstract reasoning, are integral to students’ ability to apply knowledge and visualize solutions. Studies show that young children who take keyboard lessons possess greater abstract reasoning abilities than their peers, and that these illnesses improve over time with sustained music training.

Music education bolsters student engagement and achievement in other academic subjects.

Students who study music develop musical abilities, but also receive benefits that extend to other academic areas, such as science and math. Research demonstrates that music and other arts integration practices positively affect student learning across subjects and overall scholastic success in the following ways:

1. **Facilitates learning of other subjects.** Integrating arts or music into other academic subjects, such as science and history, continues to hold impressive effects on engagement, accomplishment and content recollection of that subject. To illustrate, students in a science class who were asked to translate what was being learned into another content (science) into another mode (musical lyrics) showed significant content retention and a positive attitude toward the science material.

2. **Advances math achievement.** Students who study music outperform their non-music peers in algebra, a course found to be critical in later academic achievement. Research demonstrates that students are better able to connect with their own cultural identity and could better connect with their non-musician peers.

3. **Cultivates critical thinking skills.** Linking skills, such as abstract reasoning, are integral to students’ ability to apply knowledge and visualize solutions. Studies show that young children who take keyboard lessons possess greater abstract reasoning abilities than their peers, and that these illnesses improve over time with sustained music training.

4. **Boosts proficiency in reading, English language arts and second-language performance compared with non-music students.** Improvisational opportunities. As classrooms across the country continue to become increasingly diverse, students could better connect with their own cultural identity through participation in music.