

## Education in the Fine Arts and No Child Left Behind

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### Abstract

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was legislation enacted by the Bush administration in 2002, has been the subject of inquiry from legislators and school authorities on the potential modifications that may be implemented by the Obama administration to the NCLB. These prospective modifications were enacted in 2002. This article examines the impact that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy has had on non-tested subjects, with a particular emphasis on the role that music and the arts play within the larger educational framework. As a result of significant shifts in both funding and schedule, educators are being forced to reevaluate the advocacy strategies that have proven to be the most successful in the past.

**Keywords:** Budgeting, the NCLB, and Timelines

### INTRODUCTION

Following the inauguration of a newly elected president, there is a period of uncertainty regarding the possible shifts in policy that may take place. This condition of affairs is characterised by the presence of ambiguity. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is one of the laws that is the subject of proposals that would either amend it or do away with it entirely. Without a shadow of a doubt, the organisation and administration of the public educational institutions in this nation have been profoundly impacted by the law that has been passed. Entities that are not examined for the purpose of determining satisfactory yearly progress (AYP), which is the primary prerequisite for all federal financing, are subject to certain

immediate consequences as a result of the bill that is currently under discussion. Concerns have been raised in light of these considerations. Reading, writing, and arithmetic skill levels are the only ones that are examined in any depth during the assessment that is carried out as part of the AYP. This strategy disregards the statutory mandate that students should be adequately prepared to achieve success in a variety of disciplines that are together referred to as "core" subjects.

In spite of the fact that there is currently a paucity of knowledge regarding the long-term impacts of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) programme, it is obvious that non-tested areas have seen adverse effects in the short term, particularly those courses that are typically categorised as electives. The implementation of NCLB exams at the state level and the finance system that was already in place have presented substantial obstacles for arts education. In the field of arts education, the aforementioned issues have led to adjustments being made to the ways in which instructors and administrators handle topics pertaining to finances, possibilities for professional growth, and the arrangement of schedules.

## FUNDING

The requirement that school districts and individual schools achieve their AYP goals is the fundamental issue with the NCLB financing for schools. The AYP benchmarks are supposed to demonstrate that children who were performing poorly in the past are now receiving teaching that is up to par with their needs. This is the point of the benchmarks. If a school does not achieve the objectives in one or more of the subcategories, it is put on probation and given one more opportunity to reach the updated goals before it risks losing its financing. During the probationary phase, the school, the district, or both are responsible for developing plans to bring failed pupils up to the benchmark level and using their own resources to do so

(Chapman, 2004, 3). These solutions may include, but are not limited to, providing children with additional tutoring either during the school day or after school, as this makes use of the resources that are already available.

According to Kenny (2008), in 2007, the state of Washington spent the equivalent of 1,600 additional teaching positions on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), which cost a total of \$113 million. During the time that I was working on this piece, school districts all around the state of Washington were struggling to find a way to balance their budgets due to the deterioration of the economy and the shortfalls in tax collection. This led to the removal of teaching posts in a number of these districts, despite the fact that those districts utilised cash from the stimulus package. How many teaching positions could have been saved if school districts were not compelled to pay for the test with their own money (OSPI, 2009)? Even with a modified exam, Washington will still be required to demonstrate that it is on track to fulfil AYP requirements; therefore, the loss of teachers will definitely impede the capacity of struggling districts to reach targets.

When budgets are cut on a national level, the financing for nontested subjects is the first to be affected (Schneider 2005, 56; Pederson 2007, 287). This is because the majority of resources are assigned to areas where responsibility is reviewed. Under the NCLB, exams in the arts are authorised, but only if funding is available to support them (Schneider 2005, 56). Due to the fact that AYP exclusively evaluates students in math and reading, schools are required to evaluate pupils solely based on these two subjects. Due to the fact that the schools' achievement in other areas has no influence on funding, proper funding for them is not an incentive for the schools. The effects of this on the arts range from the abolition of entire teaching positions and programmes to the loss of support for the upkeep of musical instruments.

Because building managers are under increasing pressure to get the most out of their staffing resources, arts instructors are being strongly encouraged and in some cases even obliged to include standardised testing in their lesson plans (Chapman 2004, 3). According to the findings of research conducted by Frierson-Campbell (2007, 33), 72% of participating music instructors engaged in professional development activities focusing on integrating the arts into other academic areas. According to Gerber and Gerrity (2007) and 17, some principals place a high priority on the recruitment of art teachers who have received training in the integration of literacy and mathematics. As a consequence of this trend, the arts, and particularly music, may be in danger of losing their position as distinctive fields that each have their own distinctive knowledge bases and conceptual frameworks (Gerber and Gerrity, 2007, 17).

## SCHEDULING

There is a lot of anecdotal evidence to suggest that high-stakes testing has influenced how schools schedule classes. If a student in either the eighth or seventh grade fails the state exam, they are required to drop their one optional course. The goal of replacing the elective with math or reading remediation is to raise test scores. This method is both the most cost-effective and least disruptive to the regular school day compared to alternatives like after-school tutoring. Therefore, it makes administrative sense to replace workers voluntarily.

But in a class like music ensemble, where each member relies on the others for success, this strategy can be detrimental to everyone's learning, especially if members are added or dropped in the middle of the year. Some students who drop out of school may never get another chance to use their artistic talents in another academic setting. Students in remedial classes are often rewarded or bribed by principals and teachers through "enrichment" programmes (Dillon, 2006; Chapman, 2004, 3). Students are encouraged to attend remedial classes by being told

that if they do well, they will be allowed to return to their "fun" class. The implication is that a student's performance quality doesn't matter so long as they create something, and that the arts don't require talent, knowledge, dedication, or effort. The student may find the motivation they need at that time thanks to this incentive. Such comments also ignore state and federal rules for what constitutes grade-appropriate creative performance. Those who continue to participate in music and art classes may feel as though their efforts are being wasted. Last but not least, dismissing arts education as merely "fun" sessions devalues the knowledge and skill of any arts teacher and depicts them as secondary rather than primary figures in their students' education. This perspective is bolstered by the fact that NCLB allows schools to hire "teaching artists" instead of credentialed arts educators, allowing them to avoid the need for the typically mandated bachelor's degree preparation for teachers (Chapman 2004, 3). Teachers may initially see problems with NCLB's scheduling policies in how they assign students to classes, but this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Several middle schools have adjusted their bell schedules to mirror high school hours by providing longer but shorter class times (Gerber and Gerrity, 2007, 17). Only basic skills like reading, writing, and arithmetic are taught at some schools (Dillon, 2006). A 2004 survey of elementary school principals by The Council for Basic Education, cited by Abril and Gault (2006, 6) and Chapman (2004), found that since the implementation of NCLB, 75% of those schools have reduced instructional time for the arts while increasing instructional time for tested subjects. Although Dillon (2007), Chapman (2004, 3), and FriersonCampbell (2007, 33) argue that the effects are heightened in schools in urban and high-risk areas, the fact that schools from all fifty states participated in the survey suggests that this is a nationwide trend rather than confined to a small number of states. This is troubling since at-risk students are the

ones who stand to gain the most from a well-rounded education, and yet they are disproportionately affected by these problems.

Pre-K early education has been affected by the desire for improved maths and reading scores (Persellin 2007, 54). Furthermore, the possibility of budget cuts impacts school boards and high-level administrators, who worry that a balanced curriculum is being neglected. Whether or whether they agree with arts education, administrators must structure their schedules according to the subjects being studied (Gerber and Gerrity, 2007; Fryerson-Campbell, 2007).

## SOLUTION

It is imperative for music instructors to be able to lobby legislators and administrators in an effective manner. The arts are considered "core" subjects under NCLB, which not only gives them academic status but also exempts them from having to be evaluated. Because schools are only funded based on how well their students perform in reading and mathematics, any and all nonassessed subjects, regardless of their legal standing, receive less attention in the classroom. There are several states that evaluate their arts programmes to keep their curriculum status, but these evaluations are not done for accountability purposes. One example of this kind of accountability is the Classroom Based Assessment (CBA), which is implemented in all social studies and art classes taught in the state of Washington. There is a lot of pressure on teachers to finish the entire evaluation, which, in the case of music, is a time-consuming procedure that involves examining student performances by listening to recordings of individual students.

However, the state was only told of the total number of students who participated in the exam; it was not given how many students passed or failed the exam. Because only the most fundamental skills can be measured for an objective assessment of music, this method ignores

the intangible qualities that set the arts apart from other subjects and that we work hard to help our students experience. This method also wastes valuable instructional time, which is a problem in and of itself. Another issue with this approach is that it is the only method that can be used. Additionally, it is impossible to evaluate anything that is provided with unequal funding or support from state to state, district to district, or even school to school. This is because the level of support and funding varies. There are too many differences across music programmes for there to be any objective comparisons made between them. It is pointless to incorporate music and other kinds of artistic expression into the evaluation programme. It is not possible to differentiate between individuals who are studying music and others who are not studying music using technical proficiency as a criterion.

In order to avoid having to rely exclusively on local funding, arts educators need to also be better equipped to seek for grants and government support (Ashford, 2004, p. 22). The money that was taken out of the school district's budget should be used for teacher training and education, as well as the purchase of instructional materials and the upkeep of necessary classroom supplies. These are the kinds of resources that teachers of several other subjects already have access to.

It would be well worth the time and effort put in by the state and regional Music Educators National Conference (MENC) organisations to hire grant writers to conduct seminars at conferences. MENC stands for the Music Educators National Conference.

It is essential to carry out additional long-term empirical study on the effects of NCLB because the general public anticipates that schools will offer them with an education that is both broad and of a high standard. Because the immediate repercussions of this legislation are still beyond the scope of our understanding, we have the opportunity to advocate for its revision or

modification. Because there is a lack of long-term data, educators are unable to identify whether the favourable or unfavourable effects they notice are specific to their own institution or whether they are part of a larger trend. In order to successfully promote the education quality that the public demands, we need to reform the ineffective sections of NCLB that hinder our ability to give the best possible level of education. Only then will we be able to effectively promote the education quality that the public demands. We run the risk of causing today's short-term problems to become tomorrow's long-term problems if we continue to believe that NCLB is just a passing fad that will go away in a few years. How many children are we planning to give up during this interim period?

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