

5 Reasons Why Music Classes are the Best Test Prep for Your Kids



Nothing useful going on here. cough cough.

A friend of mine mentioned to me a few days ago that at his local high school in Massachusetts, the school's private music lessons are scheduled to be shelved for several months. At this school, students in instrumental music have the option to leave a core class, once per week, for thirty minutes, to study one-on-one with the school's music director.

Why will the lessons be halted?

To "hopefully, allow 100% of our students more time to prepare for the pilot testing of a new state mandated standardized test," according to the district's superintendent.

Let me repeat that. "Pilot testing of a new test." It's not even a real test.

It counts. For nothing.

Music IS test prep.

1) Research has repeatedly shown that students with a musical education out-perform those without a music background on standardized tests. You can read neuroscientist and musician Dr. Daniel Levitin's book, [This is Your Brain on Music](#). You can listen to

Dr. Christopher Johnson, Kansas University, professor of music education and music therapy and associate dean of the School of Fine Arts at Kansas University:

We found jumps of 22 percent in English test scores and 20 percent in math scores at elementary schools with superior music education. Results were similar in middle schools. One theory holds that higher scores result because music helps to develop attentiveness.

When you sit down and do a standardized test you are on task trying to concentrate and focus for an extended period of time. And there's really not a lot of things in school that require you to that. You can do a couple of math problems, get off task, look at the wall. You know, read a couple of lines in English and zone out. But if you zone out in band you're likely to be playing a solo. If you zone out in choir, you might sing a solo – that has to be just as mortifying.

We picked elementary or junior high schools that were fairly well matched in every demographic, except what was going on in their music classrooms. We looked for classrooms that had outstanding music education going on and classrooms that were less than adequate. Of course, this doesn't mean that if you didn't have a chorus, and you add one, your test scores will go up by 20%. But the data show a correlation over time. [Courtesy of KU- Research Matters \(2008\)](#).

2) What is the goal of an education? To test for the memorization of facts, or to help a child grow into an inquisitive adult with critical thinking and problem solving skills? Perhaps the set of skills one garners through the mastery of complex tasks:

- Reading music; interpreting the notes, key signatures, tempi, and musical dynamics
- Playing the instrument; the physical demands of small and large muscular control involved in the proper production of sound, the memorization and immediate recall

of facts such as fingerings and hand positions

- Following directions; working in concert with the conductor and those in one's section and the orchestra as a whole.

Pretty fair set of life skills.

Alternatively, you could have a kid who knows the Battle of the Boyne was fought in 1690, and that in the Krebs cycle, each glucose molecule produces two ATPs. I googled those. So can your kid. That is, if someone bothers to teach the kid how to problem solve, and to avoid fake Viagra and boob enhancement click-bait.

3) Which do you want for your kid? The lifelong joy of music, or the useless drudgery of test prep? Think back to when you were a teen. Which one fills your heart with nostalgic joy – playing in that terrible garage band you had with your buddies, singing “Let There Be Peace on Earth” with the choir for the High School Winter Concert, playing sax in concert band...

Or sitting in a stuffy classroom, listening to a teacher tell you, in front of poorly constructed PowerPoint slides, that one should always choose the longest answer of the four choices when one is uncertain as to the most correct answer.

4) Do not let your local school administrators sacrifice music from your kids at the altar of standardized tests. One little number will get posted and that number may make the school district look good. That one little number may keep some data-crazed zombies from picketing the next school board meeting. That one little number may attract a new housing development to your school district because you are a “Silver School.” Those zombies are not your problem. New houses are not your problem. Your kid's commitment to lifelong learning is your problem. Test prep sucks the life out of teachers and students alike. Solve that problem.

5) The real kicker? Memorizing unrelated facts and mastering test taking skills is no indicator of future success. Think of the most successful men and women in your

workplace. Are they “The Smartest Guys in the Room?” Doubtful.

Most likely, your firm’s MVPs are smart. But that’s not why they’re so successful. They see the world a little differently than you and I. Your company MVPs can problem-solve like crazy. They are incredibly persistent. Business MVPs are emotionally resilient. These top performers work well with their colleagues. They have a broad skill set which helps them deal with whatever the workplace throws at them. They *get stuff done*.

Kind of like a good musician.

By the way, Einstein *was* the smartest guy in the room. [Albert also played a darn fine violin](#), and used it every time he needed to think through his problems.

Which was often. As Einstein said, “Do not worry about *your difficulties in mathematics*. I can assure you mine are still greater.”

Photograph: Antonio Zazueta Olmos for the Observer

[Link to photo](#)