



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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The Value Of A Tune

JAMES L. SEWARD March 12, 2009

March may be a tough month at times, winter weather lingers, time is running out to file your taxes, and at the state level, budget negotiations are grinding along. But March is still music to my ears.

March is “Music In Our Schools” month, an official designation by The National Association for Music Education. All month long, music education becomes the focus of schools across the nation and right here in New York. In fact, “Music In Our Schools” month started right here in the Empire State in 1973, and has grown to encompass a day, then a week, and then in 1985 to become a month long celebration of school music. The purpose is to raise awareness of the importance of music education for all children, and to remind citizens that school is where all children should have access to music.

The month long celebration grows each year. Throughout New York State, music concerts are taking place highlighting the blossoming talents of our young people. It is a great opportunity for music teachers to educate the public about the benefits of a school music program. The settings can be a school gymnasium, a mall, or the concourse at the Empire State Plaza, where I have been fortunate to hear many groups from across the state and within my district on a daily basis this month.

The Middleburgh High School choir under the direction of Elizabeth Meredith and the Sherburne-Earlville Middle School band directed by Gary Solomon are among the programs making the trip to Albany to perform this month. It is a fantastic opportunity for these students to showcase their talents, and a very welcome diversion from the sometimes pressure filled days at the state capitol.

These performances are coordinated by the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA), a group which works with music educators and parents to make sure students have the opportunity to receive a well-rounded education which includes a music program. On their website, NYSSMA cites a number of positive influences music can have on a student. They include:

- Gives students access to unique ways of knowing and displaying their knowledge, music draws on the multiple intelligences and accommodates a variety of learning styles;
- Promotes cross-cultural understanding and knowledge of civilizations and cultures, past and present, and helps students appreciate the diversity of their cultural heritage;
- Provides a universal language of communication;
- Offers means for creative expression;
- Provides opportunities for students to solve problems that require higher level thinking skills;
- Promotes active rather than passive involvement;
- Makes abstract concepts concrete and understandable for learners;

- Reaches students who are not otherwise being reached (e.g. at-risk students, economically disadvantaged, underachieving gifted and talented students, students talented in performing arts);
- Transforms how students are perceived by others, revealing abilities in learners previously unrecognized by teachers or other students;
- Builds community by providing opportunities for collaboration;
- Sharpens students' learning-to-learn (critical thinking, problem-solving, perseverance) and social skills (team work, collaboration);
- Connects learning experiences to the real world of work (time management, discipline, commitment);
- Provides means for gathering concrete evidence of student learning (performance-based assessment);
- Teaches three processes of life-long learning: critical thinking, creativity, and reflection;
- Builds students' self-awareness and personal skills required for success, such as planning, persistence, perseverance, and time management.

All of these qualities can translate to success later in life, and are reasons why programs like music need to be protected in our schools. As we move through the budget process in Albany, education aid is among the items at the forefront. I have fought long and hard to protect aid to our schools so programs like music will continue to receive much needed funding. For some, it may be easy to dismiss these programs as electives, but the case for

music as an educational tool is concrete.

I invite all of you to attend a performance and hear your local students first hand, I am certain you will not be disappointed.

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