

A professor once told me that there is power in language. For that reason, I would like to begin this presentation with a collection of quotes pertaining to music education.

“Music is the universal language of mankind.” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, an American poet.

“Art and music education help children develop abstract thinking that helps them in the business world.” Alan Greenspan, former Federal Reserve chairman.

“When it comes to igniting our children’s ability to learn and imagine, the arts must be just as central to our children’s education as the three R’s.” Hilary Rodham Clinton, Presidential Candidate.

Time and time again we hear of research suggesting that music improves test scores. A ten year study by UCLA professor Dr. James Catterall shows that, “regardless of socioeconomic background, music-making students get higher marks in standardized tests”. Music teaches discipline, focus, tenacity, and countless other qualities that help students succeed. Researchers find arts training not only raises scholastic performance, but also improves student behavior and attitude. Music helps to develop spatial IQ, which is a key component in mathematics and science. Music boosts self-esteem because students are proud that they can do something special and unique. Most often, students drop out of school because they are bored, but they will sneak back into school for arts and music classes. Students can join a band instead of a gang. An unidentified commercial about the importance of music states “Making music is about more than just practice, more than just performing. Making music is about who you become along the way.” Still not impressed?

Music is listed as a core subject in the No Child Left Behind Act. Mike Huckabee, former governor of Arkansas and candidate in the 2008 presidential primaries, firmly believes music is a vital part of a well-balanced education. Huckabee said, “We need to unleash weapons of mass instruction. I’m a passionate, ardent supporter of having music and art in every school, for every student, at every grade level...it’s not frivolous; it’s because if we don’t develop the right side of the brain with the same level of attention as we do the left, which is the logical side, we end up with an unbalanced, bored student, which is exactly what we’ve done, and we’re dropping students out of our system because of it.” “This country has made a huge mistake in cutting music and art out of school budgets. And it’s something we have to address because the future economy is dependent upon a creative generation.”

Roger H. Brown, president of Berklee College of Music, speaks about the impact music has on students. We want our students to be doing well academically, being prepared for careers, having a successful life, but the student needs something that gives them energy. Studies show that it's the motivation of the teacher and the motivation of the learner that has the most to do with whether the person learns. For many students that motivational tool is music. Practicing teaches discipline and playing in an ensemble you work with others. When you learn to read music you are learning a new language, and each language you learn makes the next one a little easier. You find interest in a genre of music and become interested in the historical aspect of the music. Music provides a spiritual connection that can't be given through other academics. Today's education is so focused on high stakes testing and academic achievement that there's not much left for the many students who don't test well. Arts and athletics programs are the activities that keep those students willing to finish school. When you take those programs away, as is happening in America today, you lose the magnets that kept those atypically talented students in school and learning.

Just as I began my presentation with the words of influential thinkers, I would like to end in a similar fashion.

"I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music."
Albert Einstein, an American physicist.

"Music education opens doors that help children pass from school into the world around them. A world of work, culture, intellectual activity, and human involvement." "The future of our nation depends on providing our children with a complete education that includes music."
Gerald Ford, 38th President of the United States.

"There is something very wonderful about music. Words are wonderful enough; but music is even more wonderful. It speaks not to our thoughts as words do; it speaks through our hearts and spirits, to the very core and root of our souls. Music soothes us, stirs us up, it puts feelings in us, it can make us cringe; and it can melt us to tears; and yet we have no idea how. It is a language by itself, just as perfect in its ways as speech, as words, just as divine, just as blessed." Charles Kingsley, an English writer and clergyman.