
The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and What It Means for Music and Arts Education

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The author would like to thank Mary Luehrsen, Executive Director of the NAMM Foundation, and Lynn Tuttle, Director of Content and Policy for the National Association for Music Education, for their extensive and comprehensive contributions in the preparation of this article. Luehrsen is NAMM's chief strategist for education policy and music education advocacy. Tuttle currently serves as the AMEA Advocacy Chair and was the Director of Arts Education at the Arizona Department of Education from 2003-2015.

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What is it? A brief background In December of 2015, with bipartisan support, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) thereby reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) first signed into law in 1965 by President Johnson. Within the current law, there are a number of "Titles" which deal with various facets of the Act—many of which have been established along the way in subsequent reauthorizations after the initial signing of ESEA. The most well-known of these Titles is "Title I" as it makes up most the total funds allocated. Prior to the signing of ESSA, the last reautho-

rization of ESEA was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which was signed into law in 2001 by President George W. Bush.

What are the major changes from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and why is this important for Music and Arts Education? One of the biggest changes is that decision-making and accountability measures will no longer be dictated from the federal level—they will now originate from each individual state. State education agencies (SEAs) are currently in varying stages of developing and/or revising their State Plans to meet the provisions within ESSA and are expected to submit them to the U.S. Department of Education.

Also, ESSA places a focus on the providing of a "Well-Rounded Education" for all students. ESSA defines a "Well-Rounded Education" as follows.

S. 1177-298 (52): Definitions (Well-Rounded Education)

The term "well-rounded education" means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience.

Speaking to the Las Vegas Academy of the Arts on April 14, 2016, former Secretary of Education John King declared that while literacy and math skills are "necessary for success in college and in life...they're not by themselves

sufficient. A more well-rounded education is critical for a safe, supportive and enjoyable learning environment." (The Huffington Post, "Education Secretary John King: It's Time To Stop Ignoring The Arts And Sciences." http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/john-king-well-rounded-education_us_570e9013e4b03d8b7b9f34c6)

Why is all of this important for Music and Arts Education? ESSA has provided a major opportunity for each state to determine to what degree Music and Arts Education are incorporated into federal funding plans at the state and local level. The stage has been set: 1) Decision-making is occurring at the state level rather than from the federal level, 2) State Plans are currently under construction thus providing opportunities to have input via state arts organizations, coalitions, and interested like-minded supporters, and 3) A focus has been placed on providing a well-rounded education which, among others subjects, includes music and the arts so that all students may have "access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience."

What does this mean for Music and Arts Education and implementation of Title I?

Title I is the largest source of federal funding for education. The U.S. Department of Education website describes it as a program which "provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards."

Arizona has had more than a decade of allowing arts integration to be supported by Title I funds, first through Title I Part F funding (Comprehensive School Reform under No Child Left Behind) and

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through Title I Stimulus funds. An Arizona website for arts and Title I was created at title1arts.org in part to create a centralized portal to showcase this work and to encourage Arizona districts to undertake more Title I funded arts integration within the state. The title1arts.org site provides a direct link to the “Arizona site” which also clearly states that, “Arts programs can help schools achieve the goals of Title I by facilitating student engagement and learning, strengthening parent involvement, and improving school climate and school wide behavior.” This site even quotes Superintendent of Public Instruction Diane Douglas in her support for arts education for Arizona’s children in her remarks that, “as an artist myself, I know how important the arts are for learning. I support the arts as part of a complete education for Arizona’s children.”

As Title I can address all areas of a well-rounded education, Title I funds may open up at your school/within your district to supplement support of music education. To learn more, visit the “Everything ESSA” page at <http://bit.ly/NLCBends>.

How does all of this impact my program?

Districts will need to create their own ESSA plans for Titles I, II and IV – where music education can benefit. In fact, many districts, in anticipation of impending State Plans, have already begun this process since ESSA is to be implemented in the upcoming school year (2017-18). Keeping in mind Tip O’Neill’s famous quote that “all politics is local,” this is the perfect time to step up and become part of the process at your district and/or school level through coordinated action to ensure that music and arts education are included in the local plan.

For example, some State Departments of Education want to provide

more comprehensive in-depth accountability information to the general public beyond test scores. They may also articulate that the LEAs be required to substantiate how they are providing a well-rounded education for all students. This would indicate that there will be some measure for collecting this information from the local school district. Will music and arts education be included in the local plan as part of the definition of a well-rounded education? How can the music and arts community ensure that EVERY STUDENT will indeed be provided with access? Now more than ever, it is vital that music and arts educators work collaboratively with their associations, fellow music and arts educators, music dealers and community arts organizations to ensure that districts, and even individual schools, ENSURE that the local plan addresses music and arts education in a manner that specifies, at a minimum, what is articulated in the State Plan.

In particular, music educators will want to get involved with the creation of the Title IV plan, the section of the law bringing new funding specifically for a Well-Rounded Education. You can create your own music education needs assessment for your district using NAFME’s 2015 Opportunity-to-Learn Standards; checklist versions of these standards are now available for your use at www.nafme.org/standards.

You can also work, if you are at a Title I Schoolwide school, at making certain that music education is included in your school’s Title I Plan. ESSA encourages schools to address a well-rounded education in their Title I schoolwide plans, so now is a great time to get music included for the 2017-18 school year. To find out if you are at a Title I Schoolwide school, check with your principal and while you’re in the office, volunteer to help with the creation of next year’s plan.

This may also be a good time to dig into your music education program’s impact data and be sure that summary information on student participation and learning outcomes are widely available via your school/district website to the entire community. How does music education participation relate to student attendance, participation in advanced coursework (AP), graduation rates, student engagement, and positive school climate including behavior? The Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools published the Prelude Report: Music Makes Us Baseline Research Report which provides exactly this type of information on a district wide level. It may be worth reviewing their findings which are available at: <http://bit.ly/2BaselineResearch>. In addition, you want to get a sense of the percentage of students who are actively engaged in music and arts education at your school and begin thinking about how that percentage might be increased to address the needs of students not currently served.

Finally, visit the website of your state Department of Education and search for ESSA Consolidated State Plan. Read through it in detail to see if music and arts education have been included. If not, consider engaging your state music education advocacy group or music education association to participate in efforts to include music and the arts in the Plan. NAFME has provided a formatted sample of how music and arts education can be included in the Consolidated State Plan. That document, along with many others, is available on the NAFME website at <http://bit.ly/NCLBends>.

How to become part of the process—the four R’s:

1. REACH OUT and get involved in your state and/or local music and arts coalition or advocacy group.

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Offer your commitment and service. The NAMM Foundation provides a variety of advocacy resources online at nammfoundation.org.

2. REINFORCE that music is designated as part of a well-rounded education, not only within ESSA, but also within your State Plan
3. REMIND state, district and community leaders as well as other music and arts education stakeholders (parents, administrators, colleagues, community businesses) about the benefits of music and arts education and what it means for students and communities. Provide supportive data.

4. REQUEST that music education be included in your district's Well-Rounded Education needs assessment and possible funding under Title IV. Also, be sure to request that a well-rounded education be addressed, including music, as part of your district's Title I plan.

There are numerous resources available to assist arts educators in learning more about ESSA and its impact for music and arts education. It is highly recommended that music and arts educators review these online resources and download them to share with colleagues (department meetings, emails to colleagues), parents (parent nights, PTA meetings, booster meetings) and administrators (planning meetings with supervisors). Some of the most helpful resources include:

1. NafME: Everything ESSA site which may be accessed at: <http://4wrd.it/EVERYTHINGESSA>

2. Yamaha: The Music Teacher's Guide to ESSA, which may be accessed at: <http://4wrd.it/YAMAHA-SUPPORTED>

3. The NAMM Foundation's recently released brochure, Music is a Part of a Well-Rounded Education: What parents need to know about music education and the Every Stu-

dent Succeeds Act (ESSA) Federal Education Law. Complimentary copies (packets of 50 each to share with parents) are available to order at: <http://4wrd.it/ESSAPARENT-BROCHURE>

4. SBO: How to Use Advocacy Stats to your Best Advantage: Using Music Education Data as Indicators of a Positive School Climate by Marcia Neel at: http://4wrd.it/SBO_Marcia

5. SBO: In the Trenches: The Every Student Succeeds Act and What's in it for You! (But Only if You Act!) by Bob Morrison at: <http://4wrd.it/ESSAINTHETRENCHES>

6. Meet Title I Goals Using the Arts at: <http://4wrd.it/2TITLEIARTS>

7. Using Title I funds to support music and arts education in Arizona at: <http://www.arizonatitle1arts.org>

NOW IS THE TIME to become engaged and to engage others. With the passage of ESSA and the eventual passage of your State Plan, music and arts educators and advocates have been provided with an opportunity to speak up about the value of music and arts education. The more that we can advocate for music and the arts as part of a well-rounded education within our own districts and schools, as well as providing documented support for how Title I funds can be used for music and arts education, the better the chance that more students will have increased access to the many benefits that an education in music and the arts will provide.

