Music in the School Schedule

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ACCESS vs. PROVISION: The overwhelming majority of schools offer some form of music education. Parsad & Spiegelman (2012) found that American students have access to musical offerings at 94% of elementary schools and 91% of secondary schools, though, notably, patterns of access can be predicted by socio-economic factors. Access is less likely in more impoverished school communities.

Despite high rates of access, participation in music programs varies widely between elementary and secondary levels. Abril and Gault (2006; 2008) found that 92.5% of elementary school principals report that music is required in their school, whereas only 34% of secondary principals report music requirements in their curriculum.

STATE POLICIES: Most states have policies regarding music's place in the school schedule. The ArtScan policy database reports that 44 or 45 states require fine arts offerings at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and 26 states require completion of at least one arts course for high school graduation.

The specific language of state policies vary, however, and can leave a great deal of interpretation to local policymakers.

Tennessee Code § 49-6-1025. Art and music education.

(a) The course of instruction in all public schools for kindergarten through grade eight (K-8) shall include art and music education to help each student foster creative thinking, spatial learning, discipline, craftsmanship and the intrinsic rewards of hard work.

(b) Local boards of education are encouraged to fully implement the art and music standards adopted by the board of education through both art and music classes, as well as integration into other core academic subjects.

In Tennessee, the education code specifies that all districts will include music in the K-8 course of instruction, though it does not mandate that all students receive said instruction. Additionally, the code encourages implementing all standards-aligned arts courses. Since there are state standards for high school music, this could be interpreted as a strong indicator that high schools should offer music, but it could also be ignored as an encouragement rather than a requirement.

LOCAL POLICIES: Although state-level policies can provide a model framework for music in schools, the most important advocacy work must be undertaken at the local level. The NAfME Opportunity to Learn Standards are a key resource for advocates, suggesting that general music should be provided to all students through 8th grade for at least 90 minutes per week, and that secondary ensembles should be scheduled in an equivalent fashion to other core academic classes. Music education advocates who are aware of their existing state policies and the expectations outlined in the national standards are well-prepared to work towards ensuring equitable scheduling for music in their local schools.

ArtScan Education Policy Database: http://www.aep-arts.org/research-policy/artscan/
NAfME Opportunity to Learn Standards: https://nafme.org/my-classroom/standards/opportunity-to-learn-standards/

References: Abril, C. R. & Gault, B. M. (2006). The state of music in the elementary school: The principal's perspective. Journal of Research in Music Education, 54(1), 6–20.
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Parsad, B., & Spiegelman, M. (2012). Arts education in public elementary and secondary schools: 1999-2000 and 2009-10 (No. NCES 2012-014). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.