What is Policy in Music Education?

POLICY: A Google search of the word policy brings up the definition: "A course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, business, or individual." This definition indicates that policies are actions from different kinds of entities. Jones (2009) categorizes the types of policies created by these entities into two categories: hard policies and soft policies.

HARD POLICIES: "Compulsory requirements" that involve inducements (carrots) and threats (sticks). In music education, we might think of accreditation agencies and government officials as key creators of hard policies.

- State Government Mandates (e.g. high school graduation requirements, licensure requirements, teacher evaluation)
- Federal Government Mandates (e.g. Every Student Succeeds Act)

SOFT POLICIES: Shape perceptions and values without direct coercion; they are typically decided on at a local level. In music education, we might think of university music departments, music teacher associations, and music products industries as key creators of soft policies.

- Higher Education Decisions (e.g. university admission/audition, curricular content)
- K-12 Education Decisions (e.g. scheduling, music ensemble/course offerings)

ACTION: Music educators interact with both hard and soft policies, and we have the ability to influence both, as well. Music teachers across all levels can learn about and guide hard and soft policies through the following:

- Websites (e.g. National Education Association, Education Week)
- Social Media (e.g. Americans for the Arts, Education Week)
- Email (e.g. Chalkbeat, The National Education Policy Center)
- Participate in Comment Periods on Educational Policies (look at individual State Board or Department of Education meetings for information)
- Participate in local/district level policy decision committees (e.g. scheduling, curriculum)

It is our responsibility to continue working towards understanding the influence of hard and soft policies on our work and to ensure that the policies in place support all students and teachers.