

Curricular, Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Music Education

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Confused? That's not surprising, since music programs can, in fact, be curricular, co-curricular and/or extra-curricular. Lack of clarity about this issue is one of the main reasons so many music programs seem to be under constant attack.

This article will discuss the issues, and then offer recommendations to help you clarify definitions and budgeting for music programming in your district.

Legal Definitions Vary Widely

State laws inconsistently categorize music education. Legal definitions tend to be unclear, and may combine or interchange terms. This means your local school district administration or school board has little legal guidance regarding the academic status of the music curriculum.

State laws may even completely ignore the status of music education or mandate only certain (usually very broad) standards. Or, they may provide detailed standards that are merely classified as "guidelines," meaning they provide no legal basis for including music in the curriculum. In nearly every case, the local district administration has great flexibility in how to interpret the laws related to the music curriculum and music staffing.

Here are definitions of each of the three classifications commonly used for music education programs:

Curricular Music Education

Curricular activities are primarily cognitive events, not just "thought-less" activities. They contribute substantially to students' social, academic, intellectual, expressive and communicative development. Music education is curricular for some very practical reasons:

- Music classes, including rehearsals, are held during the regular school day (one reason why it's vital to maintain performance rehearsals during regular class time). Once a performance program is moved outside the regular schedule, it becomes extra-curricular and vulnerable to cuts, since extra-curricular programs are generally the first to go.
- The regular salaries of music teachers are funded by the same budget as other academic teachers.
- Music teachers have a full-time equivalent (FTE) value that is similar to that of other classroom teachers. In fact, music ensemble teachers, especially at the secondary level, usually have a greater financial value to the district because they teach larger classes.
- All music courses (should) receive academic credit.

Curricular examples of music: (non-performance) classroom general music, music theory & history, music appreciation, rehearsals of music performing organizations in preparation for co-curricular concerts (including the content and process of learning about music as stated in the fulfillment of competencies outlined in the curriculum).

Co-curricular Music Education

Some aspects of the academic curriculum occur outside of the regular school day, for example, the performance of the "final exam" in a public concert. Though their primary function is public demonstration of skills acquired during classroom learning, i.e, musicianship, these concerts often have public relations or public service value. These activities are or should be funded as part of the regular salary of music performance teachers.

Co-curricular examples of music: Band, choir and orchestra performances.

Extra-curricular Music Education

Whenever the performance of any district music organization is motivated primarily by public service or public relations, that organization becomes (temporarily) extra-curricular.

Nearly all extra-curricular events are held outside the normal school day (i.e., on evenings and weekends). Some organizations exist primarily for public service or public relations; these should be considered totally extra-curricular, and funded as such. Music teachers (should) receive additional "stipends" for supervision of extra-curricular activities.

Unfortunately, music educators are most visible to the public in their extra-curricular role. If music educators make no distinction between co-curricular and extra-curricular performances, the general assumption is that music educators, and therefore music programs, are extra-curricular.

Extra-curricular examples of music: Performance at any event that is not primarily music, such as athletic events, service clubs, civic events.

Where Does Confusion Surface & Create Problems?

The confusion about classifying music programs surfaces in differing perspectives on four major areas of music education:

1. Academic status - Educators, administrators and school boards differ on how to interpret the **academic status** of a music education program within the framework of state law. Sometimes co-curricular and extra-curricular may be the same, but distinguished from curricular. In other cases, the three categories are interchanged, or even interpreted as identical. In my experience, legal definitions are rarely considered, other than to provide a vehicle for moving music higher on priority lists for "make budget cuts here first."

2. Allocation of funds – Music programs can appear as **line items** in all three budgetary categories. This is particularly true when directors of music ensembles receive "extra-curricular" stipends for music performances that are funded out of the same budget categories as non-music activities perceived as "extra-curricular," such as athletics. To add further confusion, sometimes the music (performance) curriculum is even governed by the same state agency that oversees athletic competitions.

3. Philosophical debates - Music educators themselves may disagree about which category or categories best define the music program. There are **various philosophical positions** related to differences between those who emphasize music performance versus those who emphasize music education. The issues are similar to those that occur between educators surrounding athletics versus physical education. In addition, there are opposing philosophical views regarding "music education for all," versus advancement of the gifted or elite: as one music teacher described it, "we start 500 new students in band and orchestra each year. By the time they reach high school, we have it 'weeded down' to the best 50!"

4. No "SAM" – I've worked as music educator and consultant for 300+ districts, none of which had a **written, sequential curriculum with specific, achievable and measurable ("SAM") goals**. Several districts have had well-developed curricular components, some with relatively complete written documents. However, when such documents exist, one or more of the following deficiencies were evident:

- Curricular statements were written as teaching objectives, not learner outcomes.
- None of the music teachers were able to locate a copy of the curriculum; most ignored it and continued to teach to their own standards and expectations.
- Few teachers had given any consideration at all to the National Standards for Music Education.
- There were no learner outcomes defining what students should know and be able to do upon completion of their music education – and no standard or consistent system to assess what students were accomplishing.
- Without a student assessment system, school districts could not demonstrate the legitimacy of music education as a curricular or academic entity to its administration and school board.

What Can We DO About All This?

The first step is to define the three classifications – curricular, co-curricular, extra-curricular – as they exist (or should be) in your district. Policies will be based upon these definitions; they are the foundation on which you will establish the academic legitimacy of music education with your administration and board.

Until we – as music educators and music advocates – take the lead and establish clear definitions and assessment systems, music education programs will continue to be viewed as non-curricular and, therefore, expendable.

I recommend the following course of action:

- Identify every course, performing organization and performance(s) in your music education program as curricular, co-curricular and/or extra-curricular. Specify that curricular and co-curricular music programs and music staffing be funded under the regular salary and budget line items for music performance and music education. Define staffing and programmatic expenses for extra-curricular music activities as separate line items.
- Submit your document (with appropriate definitions) to your school board for adoption as official district policy.
- Establish a system to assess student achievement. This will require planning, input, data collection and consistent written documentation from all music educators in the district.
- The curriculum and assessment documents should also be submitted to your school board for adoption as official district policy.

Once the music curriculum is defined and established as official district policy, this foundation will help preserve your program in times of budgetary crisis. More importantly, in the long run, it will help you protect, strengthen and perhaps even expand music programming and student participation in music making.