



The Cost of High-Quality Public School Music Programs: It's Less than You Think

To increase our knowledge of the costs of music education programs The NAMM Foundation supported an exploratory study conducted by APA Consulting of music program spending in a diverse group of 10 school districts across the country. The study addressed the following research questions:

- 1 How much do school districts spend on music education?
- 2 How are the resources available for music education spent?
- 3 What are the sources of the resources supporting music education?

Key Findings

- The average per student spending for music programs was \$251 when counting all students, not only music students. When counting only music students, expenditures averaged \$368 per music student. On average, districts spent 1.9% of their **total operating expenditures**.
- Most music program spending, 85.4%, was for music educator salaries. The next three largest spending categories, totaling less than 10% combined, were for materials and supplies, administration, and contracted services.



Average per
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average of 1.9%
of total operating
expenditures.



- School districts spend more per student on instrumental music than on vocal or general music. Music spending per student was also higher in high schools than in middle or elementary schools.
- Music programs relied heavily on district general funds, averaging 92.6% of their funding from this source. Only 7.4% of funding came from other sources, such as student activity fees or other fundraising efforts.

Study Methods¹

The study used a mixed methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The data were collected from districts using multiple sources, including:

- Teacher surveys
- Interviews with key central office administrators and focus groups of music educators
- Budget, staffing, and other program data provided by the participating school districts

The table below summarizes the characteristics for the 10 participating districts.

Characteristics of the Participating School Districts

| School District | Grade Range | Locale | Free-Reduced Lunch % | Minority % | Total Enrollment |
|----------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------------|------------|------------------|
| School District East 1 | K-12 | Rural/Fringe | 49.3% | 20% | 850 |
| School District East 2 | K-12 | Suburban | 15.9% | 47% | 7,150 |
| School District South 1 | K-12 | Urban/City | 44.3% | 45% | 20,050 |
| School District South 2 | K-12 | Urban/City | 59.8% | 74% | 112,100 |
| School District Midwest 1 | K-12 | Suburban | 51.5% | 29% | 21,200 |
| School District Midwest 2 | K-12 | Suburban | 17.6% | 14% | 13,600 |
| School District Mountain 1 | K-12 | Urban/City | 47.7% | 16% | 10,200 |
| School District West 1 | K-12 | Urban/City | 36.3% | 43% | 15,200 |
| School District West 2 | K-8 | Suburban | 51.7% | 82% | 29,600 |
| School District West 3 | K-12 | Rural/Distant | 63.2% | 13% | 1,100 |
| Average | | | 43.7% | 58% | 23,104 |



Total district operating expenditures is the amount spent on day-to-day operations excluding buying or building schools.




How Much Did Districts Spend on Their Music Programs?

- Spending for music programs – counting all enrolled students – averaged \$251 per student, ranging from \$121 to \$360 per student.
- This average increased to \$368 when only music students were included in the count.
- Music education programs accounted for an average of 1.9% of total operating expenditures, ranging from less than one percent to 2.5%.

Interviews with district music staff suggest a key factor in spending differences is strong community support for music in schools. Strong support in the community leads to more pro-music school board members and district administrators who, in turn, are more likely to prioritize resources for music education.

Per Student Music Expenditures and Music Spending as a Percent of Total District Operating Expenditures



Interviews with district staff revealed higher spending on music was associated with strong community support.

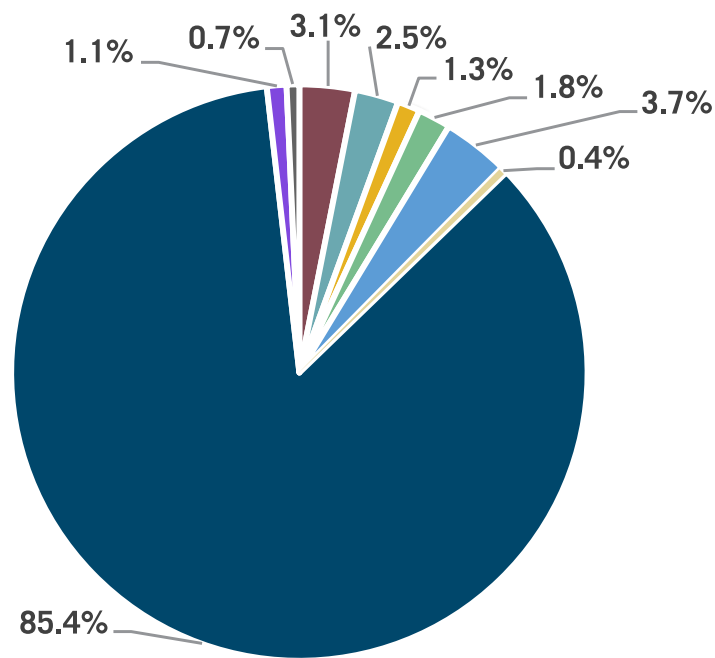
| School District | Per Student Music Expenditures | Music as Percent of Total Expenditures |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| School District East 1 | \$274 | 1.7% |
| School District East 2 | \$295 | 1.5% |
| School District South 1 | \$224 | 2.3% |
| School District South 2 | \$144 | 1.2% |
| School District Midwest 1 | \$360 | 2.4% |
| School District Midwest 2 | \$279 | 2.5% |
| School District Mountain 1 | \$232 | 2.5% |
| School District West 1 | \$250 | 2.3% |
| School District West 2 | \$121 | 0.9% |
| School District West 3 | \$331 | 2.1% |
| Average | \$251 | 1.9% |



How Did Districts Use Their Music Program Funds?

Most music program funding was used to pay for salaries and benefits for music educators. Administration accounted for only 3.1% of total music expenditures. Two smaller districts reported no expenditures for administration. Instead, their music programs were coordinated by a lead music teacher rather than paid administrative staff. All other categories of spending combined accounted for only 11.5% of total music expenditures. The chart below shows how music program dollars were used across the 10 districts.

How Music Program Dollars Were Spent



Percentages Spent

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| ■ Administration | ■ Contracted Services | ■ Maint. & Repair |
| ■ Instructional Equip. | ■ Material & Supplies | ■ Miscellaneous |
| ■ Teacher Compensation | ■ Other Instructions | ■ Student Transportation |



Music Spending Varied by Discipline and School Level

Spending on music programs varied by discipline and school level. The charts below show the breakdown of music expenditures by discipline and school level.

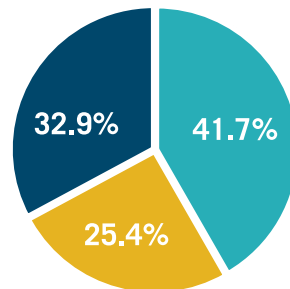
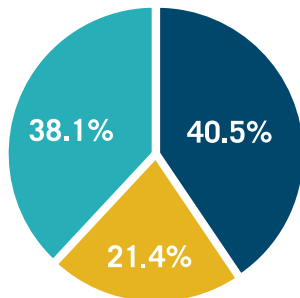
- Districts spent the largest portion of their music budgets, 40.5%, on instrumental music such as band or orchestra.
- General music, consisting primarily of elementary general music classes, accounted for 38.1% of music expenditures.
- Vocal music accounted for just 21.4% of music expenditures.

The second pie chart shows the proportion of spending by school level.

- Nearly 42% of total music expenditures were for programs in high schools.
- Elementary schools accounted for 32.9% of the total.
- Middle schools accounted for only 25.4% of music spending.

Music spending in high schools tended to be higher due to the number and breadth of music programs and performances offered. Music spending in elementary schools was primarily driven by its ubiquity, with all students in every grade receiving general music classes. Many elementary schools also offer choir and/or instrumental music beginning in later grades.

Music Spending by Discipline and School Level



■ Instrumental
 ■ Vocal
 ■ General
 ■ Elementary
 ■ Middle
 ■ High



Districts spent more on instrumental music and on high school programs than other music disciplines and school levels.



What Are the Sources of Funding for Music Programs?

On average, 92.6% of funding for music was sourced from district general funds. The remaining 7.4% came from other sources such as student activity fees, instrument rentals, or fundraising.

Music Program Funding Sources

| School District | General Fund | Other Funds |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| School District East 1 | 89.1% | 10.9% |
| School District East 2 | 100.0% | 0.0% |
| School District South 1 | 93.6% | 6.4% |
| School District South 2 | NA | NA |
| School District Midwest 1 | 94.2% | 5.8% |
| School District Midwest 2 | 100.0% | 0.0% |
| School District Mountain 1 | 99.8% | 0.2% |
| School District West 1 | 62.9% | 37.1% |
| School District West 2 | 94.1% | 5.9% |
| School District West 3 | 100.0% | 0.0% |
| Average | 92.6% | 7.4% |



A district's **general fund** makes up the **majority of its budget** and is used to **fund general district operations**.

Districts also received non-financial support from volunteers and partnerships with other organizations. Reliance on these sources varied significantly across districts and schools.

Using this Information to Make the Case for Music Education in Your Community

The information from this study may be used to build support for music education in your schools and community.

- Music programs are a good educational deal. Spending for music accounted for less than 2% of total per student spending in these districts.
- Support pro-music school board candidates. Interviews with music educators suggested a pro-music school board leads to higher spending on music programs.
- Districts and communities interested in improving their music programs may use this information as a guide to how to invest for quality.



Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that supporting a quality music education program requires a modest investment of school district resources. Given the research-supported benefits to students participating in music education, this may well be a smart investment on the part of district leadership.

Related Resources

To read the full report see Fermanich, M. L. (2021) *The costs of high-quality elementary and secondary school music education programs*. Carlsbad, CA: NAMM Foundation, at NAMMFoundation.org.

Other resources related to the costs, access, and benefits of music education in public schools include:

Fermanich, M. L. (2011). Money for music education: A district analysis of the how, what, and where of spending for music education. *Journal of Education Finance*, 37(2), 130-149.

Parsad, B. & Spiegelman, M. (2012). *Arts education in public elementary and secondary schools: 1999–2000 and 2009–10* (NCES 2012–014). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012014rev.pdf>

Workman, E. (2017). *Beyond the core: Advancing student success through the arts* (Education Trends). Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved from <https://www.ecs.org/beyond-the-core-advancing-student-success-through-the-arts/>

⁴There are two limitations to this study that may affect its findings and ability to apply its results to other districts:

- Booster club revenues and spending were not accounted for in this study. Booster clubs are independent organizations and their funds do not flow through districts' accounting systems.
- Because the study provides a description of music program resources in just 10 districts, we cannot assume the results of this study apply to other districts.

About The NAMM Foundation

The NAMM Foundation advances active participation in music making across the lifespan by supporting scientific research, philanthropic giving and public service programs.

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Founded in 1983, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates is a privately owned research and consulting firm with extensive experience analyzing public education systems and policies. Our mission is to help clients solve problems so they can meet student performance goals and improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of our nation's public schools. We also help our clients understand the fiscal, legal, and policy implications of implementing education reforms, including both short and long-term impacts. APA has worked across the country on education issues, including school finance, educator effectiveness, early childhood education, cost modeling, and program evaluation.

