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Georgia Study Key to Music Funding

Dr. John Benham and associate John Helmberger recently completed a landmark study of school music and arts programs in Georgia. The \$55,000 study was funded by the NABIM Super Fund and the Georgia State Arts Coalition.

Benham and Helmberger are hoping their study—which showed wide disparities in virtually every facet of arts education throughout the state—will provide the impetus for more state financial support of Georgia's music programs. They also hope it will serve as a model for studies throughout the country that could help keep school music programs alive.

The study's overall conclusion was that "Arts education in the state of Georgia is based on what any teacher or district decides to implement, and state guidelines are either not being used or are ineffective in facilitating student participation."

When the study was submitted to the Georgia coalition, Benham and Helmberger recommended that the state create a task force to study options for improving music and arts education.

"We think it's the most significant project we've ever taken on, and it could have the most long-term ramifications of anything we've ever done," Benham said.

Other conclusions of the study were:

- Many arts classes in elementary schools are taught by individuals who are not certified in the arts.

- Significant numbers of arts teachers are certified but are teaching outside their own areas of expertise.

- Many arts teachers spend much of their time in volunteer duties and activities just to keep their programs alive.

- Of the 1,705 arts teachers involved in the study, only 1,660 were actually teaching arts full-time. A number were teaching full-time but were only teaching arts part-time.

- Of the 1,660 full-time arts teachers, an equivalent of 47 were assigned entirely to non-arts duties.

- The staffing levels in the 33 districts ranged from one teacher for every 1,114 students to one for every 5,882 students.

- Only two districts offered band starting in grade 4, while 10 offered band beginning in grade 5 and the rest didn't start band until grade 6.

- The percentage of students eligible for band who were actually involved in band ranged from 4.95 percent to 26.66 percent.

- The average student load for classroom teachers was 144. The average student load for music performance teachers was 171. "Therefore, a performance music teacher is the same as 1.2 class-

room teachers, meaning that music teachers are saving the state \$3.6 million through the overload they are carrying," Benham said.

The study focused on three areas of concern: staffing, curriculum and student participation and their relationship to the coalition's goal of ensuring "all students learning and doing the arts for life."

"Our hope is that the study will provide the coalition with enough ammunition to go to the state board of education and legislature to provide funding for arts education," Benham said.

The study covered 641,635 students—about two-thirds of all students in Georgia—and 1,705 arts teachers in 33 districts. The districts involved in the study included some of the largest and the smallest districts in the state. Benham and Helmberger were able to study differences between larger and smaller districts in terms of class size, teacher loads and factors.

In most categories of the study there were no clear distinctions between large and small districts. One exception occurred in curricular offerings with the larger schools offering a wider variety of electives in the arts. In addition, larger districts broke down music performance classes into more skill levels.

"One of our most significant findings about instrumental music was that of the 33 districts, only 10 offered orchestra at any level," Benham noted.

He also found it significant that the schools displayed "a real lack of clarity about the difference between curricular, extracurricular and co-curricular activities." Benham explained that curricular activities are those held during the school day for academic credit and deemed essential to the intellectual, emotional and social development of students. Co-curricular activities meet the same standards but are held outside of the school day, while extracurricular activities include "any event which may result from curricular involvement in the arts but which is primarily public service or public relations in nature."

A copy of the 138-page final report on the Georgia study is available from Benham's Music in World Cultures for \$19.95 plus \$4 for shipping and handling.

Also available is a workbook, "How to Save your School Music Program: A Handbook for the Music Advocate," for \$17.95 plus \$4 for shipping and handling. Anyone interested in saving school music programs should call Benham at (612) 446-4246.

Excerpts taken from Fall 1996 issue of School Music Dealer magazine.