

MUSIC AND CONTINUITY IN EDUCATION: A STUDY ON  
MUSIC ENSEMBLES IN THE CURRICULUM OF  
OVERSEAS MILITARY-CONNECTED HIGH SCHOOLS

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the School of Music and Dance  
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Music in Music Education

June 2018

## **An Abstract of the Thesis of**

Lauren Duplessie for the degree of Bachelor of Music in Music Education  
in the School of Music and Dance to be taken June 2018

Title: Music and Continuity in Education: A Study on Music Ensembles in the  
Curriculum of Overseas Military-Connected High Schools

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Ann Tedards

The purpose of this research was to examine the extent to which military-connected schools provide opportunities for students to participate in music ensembles. The researcher proposed three primary research questions: 1) Are there standards set by the administration overseeing these schools which directly require or affect inclusion of music course offerings in the schools? 2) To what extent do military-connected high schools offer band, choir, and strings courses? 3) How frequently are courses offered at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced level at each school? Data on all three questions was collected in order to determine any correlation between curriculum standards and the presence of music in individual schools.

The researcher investigated data on schools which serve children of military sponsors. These schools face the logistic and administrative challenge of serving students in the unique situation of living outside the United States. Often, these students must move from school to school throughout their education. This research seeks to examine how music is allowed to play a role in the lives of these students.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Dr. Ann Tedards for her guidance and advice, as well as her constant encouragement and support in keeping me on track to complete this work. This project would not have been possible without her. I would also like to thank Professor Louise M Bishop for her constant vote of confidence. Her support and legendary pep talks have been an invaluable part of this thesis coming to fruition. I especially want to thank the many professors of the Clark Honors College and the UO School of Music and Dance whose lessons have been an important part of my development as a writer and a future educator. Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Beth Wheeler, my second reader, for her meticulous editing and guidance in both my Thesis and my preparation as a future music teacher. Additionally, I would like to thank Miriam Jordan and all of the Clark Honors College faculty and staff who made this project possible.

To the research correspondent for the military-connected schools at the center of this research, who provided invaluable assistance in the collection of data for this thesis, I am most grateful. I am also thankful for my family, especially my parents, who have supported me through this journey, and who have never ceased to encourage me to succeed. I want to especially thank my mother, Tara, for her encouragement to be persistent in completing this research. Most importantly, I would like to thank The Lord God, the Most High Jesus Christ, through Whom all things are possible. Our help is in the Name of the Lord Who made Heaven and Earth, amen.

## Table of Contents

I. Introduction	1
II. Background	6
Brief History of Military-Connected Schools	6
Justification of Research	7
Why Military Schools?	7
Why Music Education?	8
Existing Literature	12
Studies on MCSA Schools and High Achievement	13
Studies on Music and Scholastic Achievement	16
III. Methodology	21
The Research Process and MCSA Policy	23
Security and Restrictions Regarding use of Names	23
Limitations	24
IV. Data Collection Results	26
Standards and Requirements in Military-Connected Schools Overseas	26
Curriculum	26
Graduation Requirements	28
Fine Arts and Music Standards	29
Music Course Offerings across Military-Connected High Schools	32
Data on Individual Schools in District B	33
V. Discussion of Data	35
MCSA and Non-Military State Graduation Requirements	35
Number of Instructors in District B Schools	38
MCSA Music Standards and National Music Standards	39
VI. Conclusion	44
Appendix 1: Table 1	49
Appendix 2: Table 2	50
Appendix 3: Table 3	54
Bibliography	55

## I. Introduction

Military families face a multitude of unique challenges. When the United States military relocates a service member and his or her family overseas, the entire family undergoes a drastic shift in lifestyle. For some children, this may include a series of tours in various locations both in and out of the United States. Some stations may last years while others may last only a few months. Being a military dependent means serving alongside the soldier, and requires a high level of adaptability in periods of change. This change can be jarring, especially for children. As with any family move, military children must quickly adapt to new schools, new friends, and new communities in short periods of time.

Many students from military families experience relocation throughout their education. These populations of students are considered high mobility, a situation which even without the added challenges of being connected with the military can be very difficult for students. It involves little continuity with regard to people, places, and, often, quality of education. Even military dependent students who remain within the United States for most of their lives face the prospect of moving frequently. They encounter new schools, new communities, and new expectations regularly. In addition, variables such as new countries, new cultures, and heightened security risks present unique challenges to children whose families are stationed overseas. These challenges alone indicate that continuity is difficult to achieve in the lives of these students. The family itself may, at times, be one environment which provides continuity, but even overseas tours often still include deployments. The nature of a military career means that the serving parent may receive orders to leave home at any time. There is also the

risk, especially during times of war that the service member may not return home. Uncertainty is a part of life for many military families, suggesting that sources of continuity are especially important.

The U.S. military provides education for military dependent children in families living outside the United States. With any move, the school is one of the first ways a child interacts with a new community. For a child living abroad, the school becomes even more important for coping with the pressures of daily life. A military child's experience with a new school can make all the difference in how he or she adjusts to the new realities of living in a community kept under heightened security in a foreign country.

The schools at the center of this research operate with a higher level of security for the sake of the students and their families. In the interest of protection and anonymity, the schools studied herein will not be identified (see *Methodology*). The overseeing organization of all military-connected schools discussed in this paper, both stateside and overseas, will be referred to as the Military-Connected School Administration (MCSA) to meet its requirements that the actual name of this system not be used (see *Methodology*, pg. 22). MCSA comprises two districts of schools. The first includes all domestic military-connected schools and will be called District A. This research will cover very little regarding District A schools. The second district and the focus of this research will be referred to as Military School District B. District B includes those military-connected schools which are located outside the United States. These are the schools which will feature in this thesis. All schools under MCSA are faced with the formidable task of educating a population of students which exists in a

state of constant change. Despite these challenges, studies show that the students of the schools at the center of this research, i.e., District B schools, along with students in stateside military schools (District A), tend to academically outperform their stateside peers in non-military public schools, as will be discussed later in greater detail. Their performance alone makes these schools a subject of study to be held as an example for what other public schools might strive to provide for their students. This research focuses on a curricular area which concerns not only high-performance schools, but all schools in the United States: the inclusion of music in the academic program. At the heart of this research is an over-arching interest in whether or not military dependent students are able to participate in music in some way in District B schools. The research focuses specifically on ensemble courses because of the unique opportunities for community, collaboration, and personal development afforded by these courses.

I first came to this research from a place of personal experience. In my third year of high school, the U.S. military stationed my family overseas. I had the privilege of attending a school which served military-sponsored children like myself. As a student and a musician, many of the concerns expressed in this paper were ones which I faced as I continued my education in a new country. Music had been a large part of my studies in middle and high school before moving, and singing had always been a way for me to grow academically and personally. I was uncertain what music opportunities I would find in my new school. Unfortunately, the music program at my own military-connected high school was very small, and the course offerings limited. This raised questions in my mind about the music ensembles offered at schools throughout District B.

Despite finding limitations with the music programs of my own school, I did find other ways to participate in music in and out of school. There was an honor choir which brought together students from multiple District B schools. This gave me the opportunity to see what other District B music programs were like and further sparked my curiosity about the inclusion of music in military-connected schools. I was also lucky enough to find musical opportunities outside of school which allowed me to continue to study voice as an instrument, and which helped me to feel a sense of community among those I met. Despite these sources of support in my education, I also experienced the hardships of entering a new community in a foreign country. I encountered security measures and anticipated threats which I had never imagined. This reality came with the added challenge of focusing on school while fearing for my father's safety during deployment. Because of my own experience in military-connected schools, I believe that it is a central part of the mission of these schools to support students who continue to face such challenges today.

The opportunities which military-connected schools provide can greatly impact how students bear the transition to life overseas. The courses offered by each school facilitate the classroom communities in which these students will spend their time. More specifically, the communities formed in music ensemble courses may offer many valuable academic and social benefits to these students. Three primary questions drive this research investigating music ensembles in District B schools: 1) Are there standards set by the MCSA which directly require or affect inclusion of music course offerings in the schools? 2) To what extent do District B high schools offer band, choir, and strings courses? 3) How frequently are courses offered at the beginning, intermediate, and

advanced level at each school? Taken together, the three research questions outline the investigation into the extent to which music opportunities are offered in military-connected schools overseas.

The purpose of this project comprises two levels: standards and practice. First, this research will examine the standards prescribed for the implementation of music ensembles in military-connected schools. Second, this study will examine whether or not these standards are put into practice and to what degree. Furthermore, this study will examine the extent to which specificity in the standards for music affects continuity in the offering of ensemble courses in high schools connected with the military and based overseas (District B). Finally, at the heart of this research is the concern that military students, who may benefit from participation in music, should be given the opportunity to study music continuously throughout their education.

## II. Background

### Brief History of Military-Connected Schools

Schools for military dependents have existed on military bases throughout the United States since 1821. Additionally, military-connected schools outside the U.S. have been in existence since the end of World War II, when soldiers began to be stationed overseas with their families.<sup>1</sup> These schools provided a place for military dependent children and the children of civilians working for the United States military to start and continue their education while living overseas. District B schools fall under various regional delineations; however, all of these schools take their standards and expectations from policies set in place by the MCSA for both of its underlying districts, including District B. Thus, in this thesis, research will focus on standards at the MCSA level, and it will examine implementation of standards at the District B level.

Originally, the U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force each supervised their own schools individually. Even today, the schools are located on individual bases and posts according to the branch of the military which houses each. However, in 1964, these school systems were consolidated under the MCSA. They would later become a single, unified faction of that school system in 1979, that is, District B. Currently, MCSA is responsible for 168 schools and over 73,000 military dependent students.<sup>2</sup> 113 of these military-connected schools are outside the United States, located across 11 countries (District B). The sheer number of military-connected schools overseas and the global area across which they are based give a sense of the immense logistical challenge faced

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<sup>1</sup> “About [MCSA]” MCSA Website. Accessed 11/17/2017

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

by the U.S. and by MCSA to provide continuous, high-quality education to all of its military-dependent students. This is another reason to consider in more detail the specific elements of the education provided to these students, as well as the extent to which continuity is or is not observed across schools.

## **Justification of Research**

### *Why Military Schools?*

The issues examined in this thesis relate to multiple areas of public education and not exclusively to the extra challenges faced by military-connected schools. So, why focus on military schools specifically? Beside the fact that this is a population of students not frequently studied, this population also presents a prime example of high mobility students. Due to frequent relocation, this is a population in which many students are under greater stress than their stateside peers. Their environment is often in a state of fluctuation, creating a greater need for a sense of belonging to a community. Music ensembles in schools may alleviate some of these issues for students. As this research will show, however, extensive opportunities to find solace in music are not always provided in District B schools.

Moving overseas comes with a multitude of stressors for both the soldier and his or her family. It introduces them to new cultures, new languages, and even new laws to quickly absorb and to which they must adjust. Relocating to a foreign country also involves new security issues for both the soldier and his or her family. Whereas being aware of one's words and actions from a security standpoint may not have been a part of everyday life in the United States, it becomes a prominent concern for the entire

military family when living abroad. For children in military-connected schools overseas, these pressures to protect themselves and their families can be immense. Consider this description of life for military dependents overseas after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001:

“For these children living on military installations in Germany after 9/11 there was no “return to normal” as there was for nonmilitary children back home, where people returned to their routines... These military children were well aware that they were still potential targets, and that they had to be vigilant when traveling with their families. They had to walk long distances to buy groceries with their families at the base commissary, because there were concrete barriers that kept them from parking within 100 yards. In addition, they were still being checked on their school buses for an identification badge that even kindergartners had to have around their necks...”<sup>3</sup>

The students described above lived in an environment characterized by heightened caution and potential separation from host nation communities. Later parts of this document will discuss how music can provide a community in which these students can thrive and develop.

### *Why Music Education?*

At this point it is important to consider why examining availability of music education programs in schools under Military School District B is worthwhile. One of the intended broader goals for this project is to create interest for the greater incorporation of music education in MCSA standards and District B course offerings for the purpose of ensuring District B students have opportunities to participate in music ensembles. Another intended goal is to draw connections between the standards,

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hardaway, Ed. Nancy Boyd Webb. *Mass Trauma and Violence: Helping Families and Children Cope*. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004), 276

graduation requirements, and the courses actually offered by District B. For the high school graduating classes of 2014 and 2015 in MCSA schools, students were required to complete one (1) credit in the category of “Fine Arts” which could be fulfilled with a “course in visual arts, music, theater, and/or humanities.”<sup>4</sup> Participation in a music ensemble is not an exclusive course requirement. This indicates that District B is not obligated to provide music in all of its schools.

Studying music in an ensemble setting involves what Kenneth Phillips calls, “Cooperative Learning.” Much like the cooperation required for any team sport, music ensemble courses offer an environment in which students must rely on one another and learn to work together in a selfless way. Unlike team sports, however, music provides this sense of community in an academic setting and involves different sets of critical thinking skills. In a study on student musicians and athletes in 2016, Cabane, Hille, and Lechner found that students who study music in secondary education show greater development of cognitive skills, particularly for language study, when compared with students who play sports but do not study music.<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that student athletic participation is less important than music study, but that sports and music each help to develop different cognitive areas in students. Philips writes with regard to choral classrooms, “In choir the final group effort is dependent upon each individual singing and adding his or her voice to the whole.”<sup>6</sup> Each student has a contribution to make, no matter their experience or skill level, and each must find a way to offer this contribution without disregarding the contributions of their fellow music-makers. Students must

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<sup>4</sup> “[MCSA] Graduation Requirements” MCSA Website. Accessed 11/17/2017

<sup>5</sup> Charlotte Cabane, Adrian Hille, and Michael Lechner. “Mozart or Pelé?” (*Labour Economics* 2016) 98

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth H. Phillips, *Directing the Choral Music Program*. (Oxford University Press, 2015), 29

learn to value the strengths and weaknesses of their peers while recognizing and valuing their own strengths and weaknesses. In music ensembles, students can learn to recognize their own impact on others in a community environment, and they may also learn to apply that awareness in group situations beyond the classroom. These cooperative learning skills may be useful to students learning to support their peers through the potential stress of moving, deployment, and trauma related to military life.

Participation in music can help military dependent students beyond high school as well. Many colleges and universities now seek students who demonstrate a variety of skills in many areas of study. However, in one study, Professor Richard Strauch at Whitworth University focused on students who, rather than strictly seeking to diversify their extracurricular activities, maintained an involvement in music throughout high school. The study showed that these students tended to enter Whitworth with higher SAT scores and better GPAs than their peers who were not as musically involved.<sup>7</sup> Music ensemble courses in schools come with the benefit of being both academic activities and extracurricular ones. Studies like Strauch's suggest that continuous participation in music programs is an appealing detail to have on a transcript and allows students more options when applying for colleges and scholarships. Staying in a single subject over multiple years can be difficult for students whose families move frequently. This is yet another reason why it may be important for District B schools to offer opportunities to participate in music ensembles at multiple levels, so that high mobility students may continue their music education wherever they move. District B students face the disadvantage of living in locations far removed from prospective

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Strauch, "High School Music and College Success" *Voice* (2008)  
<https://www.wmea.org/subcontent.aspx?SecID=797>

schools in the United States. This complicates the logistics for applying for colleges, as well as visiting them. Participation in a music ensemble, especially one which exposes students to opportunities to explore foreign cultures, languages, and education systems may boost a college application and better prepare a student with the critical thinking skills needed for undergraduate study. This is yet another reason to examine how military-connected schools overseas incorporate music programs in their course offerings in order to know if these schools support students in this way.

Music offers a way to study the rich musical traditions and art of many cultures. School music ensembles may provide students the opportunity to study music in multiple languages and styles from around the world. In District B schools, this is especially important as music instructors have the unique option of incorporating the traditions and current musical practices of the host country where they are stationed. For example, in my own experience with a District B honor choir, it was enriching to study Brahms' "Die Mainacht" in the physical setting of German springtime. District B schools should take advantage of the global locations afforded them by encouraging students to connect with their surroundings through music.

It is an important part of social development that students explore other cultures as well as learn to express their own identities in a respectful way. In a study conducted in 2013, researchers Ilari, Hafleck, and Crawford examine developing cultural understanding through singing. They discuss studying song as a healthy way of expressing identity, as well as better understanding the identity of another. They specifically cite the ability to use music as a vehicle for conversation in the classroom

about different cultural backgrounds.<sup>8</sup> The world today is marked by cultural misunderstanding and exclusivity. Developing an understanding of multiple cultural perspectives through music is not a guaranteed way to prevent cultural misunderstanding, but it can help develop individuals who might better be disposed to make a difference. Military dependents in District B have the unique opportunity to live and attend schools in host countries around the world. It is important to examine to what extent the opportunity to explore the musical traditions of these countries is presented to military dependents through music ensembles.

The many benefits of studying music in an ensemble setting suggest that the opportunity to participate should be offered to all students. Essentially, the sections above outline why, if the implementation of music ensembles in District B schools is not already a priority for MCSA, it should be. Studying music offers students a multitude of ways to grow personally, as well as academically. The skills which music ensemble courses offer students may be particularly important for District B students, given their unique placement in the global community, as well as their potential high mobility status.

### **Existing Literature**

Very little literature is readily available focusing on music ensemble opportunities in District B schools. However, researchers have studied the overall high achievement of students in military-connected schools when compared with non-military schools in the United States. Furthermore, there is a great deal of literature on

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<sup>8</sup> Beatriz Ilari, Lily Chen-Hafteck, and Lisa Crawford. "Singing and Cultural Understanding: A Music Education Perspective." *International Journal of Music Education* 31, no. 2 (2013) 203.

the importance of music ensembles as part of a well-rounded high school education. Many of these studies reveal a correlation between high academic performance and music ensemble participation for high school students. This is of interest in this project because it reveals how the inclusion of music might contribute to the quality of education which District B provides its students under the Military-Connected School Administration guidelines. MCSA does show a commitment to making improvements according to the needs of its students in its standards (see Data Collection Results). Arguably, providing further guidance for course offerings, especially course offerings in music, would be one way of contributing to a higher quality of education.

#### *Studies on MCSA Schools and High Achievement*

Much of the research regarding the MCSA and District B course offerings focuses on the high academic performance of all students under the MCSA. Under the direction of the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP), Smrekar, Guthrie, Owens, and Sims set out to evaluate student achievement in these schools around the world as well as to determine some of the aspects of MCSA administration which contribute to these high success rates. The researchers found that “both domestic [district A] and overseas [district B] schools scored at or near the top of all states in reading and writing on the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress.”<sup>9</sup> The success of both districts under MCSA indicates a commitment to excellence at the administrative level.

The researchers for the NEGP were concerned with how high achievement is accomplished in the individual schools under all of MCSA. Among some of the

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<sup>9</sup> Claire Smrekar, et. al. “March Toward Excellence: School Success and Minority Student Achievement in Department of Defense Schools” Report to the National Education Goals Panel, 2001. i.

attributes cited in their report are “small school size conducive to trust, communication and sense of community” and “academic focus and high expectation for all students.”<sup>10</sup> The ‘small school’ aspect is reported as allowing for “greater familiarity and personal knowledge of students, their instructional needs and strengths, and their unique family situations.”<sup>11</sup> Communities fostered in the music classroom are not the only possible source of support for military dependents. However, the benefits of studying music in the context of these tight school communities could be invaluable to the development of any student, let alone that of a military child.

Part of the NEGP study involved the researchers investigating the strengths of District B schools from the perspective of faculty and students. The researchers conducted a survey among MCSA students to better gauge how ‘academic focus’ and ‘high expectations’ play a role in student success. They compared answers from students in stateside schools in MCSA with a national sample and found that “In ...[District A schools], 81% of the students reported that teachers' expectations of students are ‘very positive,’ compared to 58% in the national public school sample.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, not only are standards for achievement high in MCSA, but, more importantly, students are aware of the high academic expectations set for them in this school system. Furthermore, the study found that one of the most significant factors in high achievement in MCSA is the way in which education is valued in the military community overall. The study cites a high level of parent and community support for

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<sup>10</sup> Claire Smrekar, et. al. “March Toward Excellence: School Success and Minority Student Achievement in Department of Defense Schools” Report to the National Education Goals Panel, 2001, i.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, xii

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 26

students in and out of the classroom as an important element of success in... [MCSA].<sup>13</sup> Music programs are always in need of community and parent support to be successful. MCSA is shown to have this support in place and could use it to foster music programs in its schools.

Other studies reveal how military-connected schools excel at supporting students with high mobility. This should come as no surprise since military dependents are usually subject to relatively frequent relocation. The studies show how MCSA creates an environment where these high mobility students can thrive. The researchers in the NEGP study referenced above report the following on challenges faced by military students:

“[students in the study] were found to have high rates of student mobility (35% of the students change school each year); of poverty (50% of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunch); and of modest parental education (94% of the children of enlisted personnel, who comprise about 80% of the [MCSA] school population, have parents with no more than a high school education.)”<sup>14</sup>

Smrekar and Owens, who were members of the team of researchers for the NEGP study, focus specifically in their extended research on how high mobility students thrive in military-connected schools. The researchers conducted a series of over 130 interviews to determine further what MCSA schools seem to do well in supporting students. One of the most interesting qualities is the presence of what the authors cite as “social capital.” They report,

“[MCSA] schools reflect the critical elements of social capital that include shared values, norms, and attitudes that help promote trust,

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<sup>13</sup> Claire Smrekar, et. al. “March Toward Excellence: School Success and Minority Student Achievement in Department of Defense Schools” Report to the National Education Goals Panel, 2001, xii

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

facilitate open and fluid communication, and produce purposeful and meaningful activities that benefit students and adults alike in schools.”<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to note how MCSA school communities, however small, produce such close ties which benefit students in this way. These aspects of social capital in particular appear to promote a sense of continuity and community engagement for students who might live in multiple different communities over a relatively short period of time. My research comes from a place of particular interest in how these school communities include music ensembles as part of “promoting trust” and “producing purposeful and meaningful activities.” The next section will examine how music ensembles in high schools impact academic achievement, another key reason for determining to what extent MCSA administration is able to provide such activities to its students.

#### *Studies on Music and Scholastic Achievement*

In the body of research on music in schools, there is no shortage of literature demonstrating the correlations between music study and academic achievement. The number of studies discussed here which indicate this correlation should not be ignored especially in the context of MCSA schools. They may point to reasons why these schools might further benefit from ensuring that music ensemble courses are offered to their students. This section describes several examples of studies conducted to examine the correlations between music study and high student achievement in American schools, both military and non-military.

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<sup>15</sup> Claire E. Smrekar and Debra E. Owens, "'It's a Way of Life for Us': High Mobility and High Achievement in Department of Defense Schools." *Journal of Negro Education* 72, no. 1 (2003): 174.

National standardized test scores such as SAT scores are of particular interest to this project because any data collected would include the performance levels of MCSA students. Sue Rarus conducted a study through the National Association for Music Education (then known by the acronym, MENC) in 1999. She collected data on the correlation between years of study in the arts and SAT scores. Rarus retrieved SAT scores from the College Board, as well as data on responses to questions from the Student Descriptive Questionnaire filled out during the administration of the SAT. Data for this study regarding participation in music programs is based on student self-reporting.

According to scores collected for the 1998 SATs, for students with four or more years of fine arts coursework—which includes music, visual arts, and theatre arts in the context of this study- the average scoring was 50 points higher on the Verbal section and 32 points higher on the Math section than the average for students with half a year or less of fine arts coursework. In 1999, the average for the Verbal Section was 51 points higher and 38 points higher for the Math average. Rarus also reports that 1999 SAT verbal section scores were 53 points high than average for students who participated in music in school than for those who had not. Students with music coursework scored 39 points higher on the math section.<sup>16</sup>

The study also shows a consistent positive relationship between more years of studying the arts and scoring well on the SAT. Additionally, the researchers looked at scoring in relation to the types of fine arts courses students pursued. Students who

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<sup>16</sup> Sue Rarus, “SAT Scores of Students in the Arts” Music Makes the Difference: Music, Brain Development and Learning. (Reston, MENC: The National Association for Music Education, 2000) 56-57

specifically studied “Music: Study or Appreciation” and “Music Performance” earned significantly above-average scores as well. Furthermore, among the list of 8 categories of fine arts coursework, mean scores for students who pursued “Music: Study and Appreciation” ranked second only to scores collected for students who pursued “Acting/Play Production.”<sup>17</sup> These scores indicate a correlation between studying music and developing cognitive skills needed in multiple areas of study.

Further evidence for the positive effects of pursuing more than one credit of school music comes from a study conducted by Cox and Stephens. This study compared GPAs in mathematics for music and non-music students across all four grade levels at a Nebraska high school.

While initial reports found that there was little difference between the math and cumulative GPAs of music and non-music students when separated by categories of “some music credits” and “none”, the results did show that the more music credits students had, the higher their math and cumulative GPAs when compared with other students with fewer music credits.<sup>18</sup> This study serves to suggest the benefits of pursuing multiple years of music study in high school, another reason to consider this kind of data in the research for this project.

There are other studies that show a correlation between music study in schools and high achievement in state-wide standardized testing as well. Researcher Linda Thornton examined standardized test scores for nearly 7,000 students in various districts

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<sup>17</sup> Sue Rarus, “SAT Scores of Students in the Arts” Music Makes the Difference: Music, Brain Development and Learning. (Reston, MENC: The National Association for Music Education, 2000) 56-57

<sup>18</sup> H. A. Cox & L. J. Stephens “The Effect of Music Participation on Mathematical Achievement and Overall Academic Achievement of High School Students”, International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology, (2006) 37:7, 757-763, DOI: 10.1080/002077390500137811

across the state of Pennsylvania. The purpose of the study was to determine whether or not the amount of time devoted to studying music at various grade levels put students at a disadvantage for state testing. Within the selection, Thornton defined “music students” based on study in at least one of two types of musical activities: “(a) Voluntary curricular music activities, such as band, choir, and orchestra and/or (b) Voluntary extra-curricular music activities, such as show choir, marching band, district ensembles, and so on.”<sup>19</sup> The study found that overall, “music students” significantly outperformed their non-music peers.<sup>20</sup>

Further studies of interest focus not only on test scores and high GPAs among students who study the arts, but also on the useful social attributes which seem to be prevalent among these students. In one particular study for the National Endowment of Arts, Catterall and Dumais looked first at correlations between arts involvement and high GPAs among students. The researchers were largely concerned with looking at music participation and high achievement among low Socio-Economic Status (SES) in particular. High levels of participation in the arts in schools resulted in significantly higher average GPAs among low SES students when compared with low arts participation.

Additionally, the study found that students engaged in the arts were statistically more likely to go on to attend four-year colleges. They were also more likely to be more

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<sup>19</sup> Linda Thornton. "A Comparison of State Assessment Scores Between Music and Nonmusic Students." UPDATE: Applications Of Research In Music Education 32, no. 1 (November 2013): 5-11. Professional Development Collection, EBSCOhost (accessed April 23, 2017) 6

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 8

involved in world politics and more involved in community activities.<sup>21</sup> This is of particular interest for fine-arts participation in the District B as students overseas have the opportunity to be engaged in the military community as well as host-nation communities.

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<sup>21</sup> James S. Catterall and Susan A. Dumais “The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies” National Endowment for the Arts. (Washington D.C., 2012)

### **III. Methodology**

This research focused on music programs, both choral and instrumental in high schools under District B specifically. The first question that I intended to answer was whether or not the specificity of standards set by MCSA appears to have any impact on the continuity of music education across District B schools via the inclusion of music ensemble courses at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. The second question was whether or not every District B high school provides students with opportunities to participate in band, orchestra, or choir. The third question was whether or not these ensemble courses were offered at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels at all schools.

The first step in data collection for this project was to seek out existing standards, not only for what MCSA requires District B schools to offer, but also for what students are required to take in order to graduate from District B schools. This was done by examining published curricular standards through the Headquarters website for MCSA and through correspondence with a research director employed by MCSA. The researcher sought specific requirements concerning the implementation of music ensembles in all MCSA schools. All references to music requirements and proficiency expectations, as well as course requirement categories, such as “Fine Arts” were recorded. The full list of music-related course offerings for all school systems under MCSA was also recorded, in order to determine what alternatives to music ensembles these schools offer.

One concern of this research was the implementation of standards and guidelines. Thus, the next step was to determine whether or not District B schools meet,

exceed, or fail to meet MCSA standards. Of the 113 schools overseas in District B, 19 are high schools which are not combined with middle or elementary schools. This study focuses on these 19 high schools because the combined schools may include age group and student population factors which may affect the implementation of music ensembles. The study includes schools from all regions covered by District B to allow for comparison of course offerings from region to region, especially in the case that one region may have specific characteristics or obstacles which impact music inclusion in those schools.

The primary portion of the data for this study was acquired from the “curriculum” sections of the websites for each school individually. For each of these schools the following data were recorded: 1) The number of courses listed for Band, Choir, and Strings for each school, and 2) the levels of music ensembles offered at each school, to include four categories: “beginner”, “intermediate”, “advanced”, and “not specified”. Because these websites may be unreliable in reporting current available courses, all collected data was verified through the MCSA research correspondent. Additional data on the numbers of music instructors for each school were also acquired from the research correspondent. The purpose was to examine any potential relationship between the standards set for music inclusion and the hiring of music teachers according to number of courses offered.

Finally, in order to provide a contextual comparison of military-connected and non-military schools, data were collected on American state-level high school graduation requirements. The specific focus was on which states require Fine-Arts credits separately from other subjects such as foreign language study and technical

education. Both the number of credits required for graduation and all definitions or notes about what state education departments define as “Fine Arts” were included.

### *The Research Process and MCSA Policy*

Conducting research on these military-connected schools is no simple task. In addition to MCSA’s security policies discussed below, there is an approval process for any parties seeking to conduct any research relating to the military-connected schools under MCSA. Regardless of the nature of research, MCSA requires the researcher to complete Human Subjects training before proceeding. Additionally, MCSA requires a letter of determination to be provided by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). The approval process, including review of the research agreement takes approximately 1-2 months for initial review and up to an additional month for any clarifications in need of review and approval. All requirements for Institutional Review and MCSA research approval were met for this research.

### *Security and Restrictions Regarding use of Names*

The schools and districts at the center of this research operate under a higher level of security than other public school systems in the United States. Because of this, those conducting research on these schools must complete an approval process which includes a research agreement barring direct identification of any of the military-connected organizations discussed herein. Furthermore, no direct contact with the schools in question is allowed and all research must be conducted through the research correspondent.

The names of the districts and schools at the center of this research may not be used in any formal report. In order to distinguish between the overseeing school system, the overseas school district, and the individual schools, alternative names have been assigned to each. As stated before, the school system which oversees all of the military-connected schools is referred to in this report as MCSA, which includes a component of schools outside the United States, designated District B. The individual schools have each been assigned a number with the prefix, DB for District B. For example, the first school in the table is listed as DB 1. Any other identifiers are disallowed by the research agreement under MCSA.

### *Limitations*

One of the limitations of doing research on military-connected schools is that these schools are often in a state of constant change. Military families come and go and school populations tend to fluctuate. The environments of these schools also continue to change, especially as political atmospheres overseas become more turbulent. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that these changes in school circumstances may affect such factors as funding, student population size, and faculty, which may in turn impact the music courses made available in each school. It is also important to consider that the data reflected in this report on individual schools only pertains to the 2017-18 school year and may in fact differ greatly from year to year based on other external factors not studied in this report. Additional security concerns stated above and the inability to interact directly with schools and administration or faculty make it difficult to collect data directly related to the actual people this research concerns.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind while viewing this data that these are the courses stated as offered at the beginning of the academic year. The numbers reflect the courses as advertised, but may not fully reflect what courses are active in the schools at the time of this research. Still, this research focuses more on whether or not these ensemble opportunities are *offered*, not necessarily whether or not students take advantage of the opportunities. That is a separate issue regarding music in education which, while significant and related, will not be discussed here. This data is still valuable, despite this limitation, because it reveals what each school must be *capable* of offering, as well as what each is *willing* to offer students. These are important details since the intent of this project is to explore to what extent District B schools at least offer students the opportunity to participate in music ensembles, whether or not students choose to do so.

## **IV. Data Collection Results**

### **Standards and Requirements in Military-Connected Schools Overseas**

In examining more closely how music is incorporated into the curriculum for American military-connected high schools around the world, it is important first to review the standards set for these schools that are both directly and indirectly related to music education requirements in District B. As stated before, this research focuses on the implementation of music ensemble courses at the high school level based upon standards set by MCSA. This section will cover the core curriculum and school standards, as well as music-related standards and graduation requirements referring to music coursework. Additionally, the educational priorities which influence the overall structure of the curriculum and standards in this school system will be reviewed in depth. Once this framework is in place, it will be easier to determine what connections exist between these standards and the music courses actually offered by District B.

#### *Curriculum*

Before exploring where music fits in the adopted curriculum, it is useful to first examine where the MCSA curriculum for core subjects takes its cues. MCSA primarily bases curriculum on a number of national education guidelines, including College and Career Readiness (CCR). CCR refers to a greater effort in schools to better prepare students for life after high school. At its center is a desire to improve students' abilities in Language Arts literacy and in mathematics. This is not to say that CCR does not make provisions for subjects beyond these two core areas; rather, it places emphasis on these two subjects. At the national level, CCR does in fact provide goals for the arts

under the classification of “Technical Subjects.” While this does not specify the role of music in education, MCSA has also developed its own CCR Arts standards (see *Fine Arts and Music Standards*, pg. 29).

Plans for curriculum in MCSA are also based on the Community Strategic Plan (CSP), a plan based on a series of goals for achieving excellence in five areas in schools: student, school, talent, organization, and outreach. Each area calls for a commitment to providing students with a well-rounded education which develops the whole individual. The MCSA distinguishes two current priorities for working toward these goals: “1) establishing an educational system that progressively builds the college and career readiness of all... students; and 2) establishing the organizational capacity to operate more effectively and efficiently as a model, unified school system.”<sup>22</sup> These priorities indicate the specific areas in which these schools are being directed to make improvements, both from a curriculum standpoint and from an administrative standpoint.

The emphasis CSP places on building community within schools and helping students to grow and prepare for life beyond high school does not directly cite the inclusion of music courses as a part of the process. However, participation in music courses is cited as an integral part of student development and school community building in MCSA curriculum summaries for music.<sup>23</sup> Another apparent priority is unity across the school system, which entails developing a standardized expectation for all schools under it. Part of the process of standardization is apparent as the CSP and the emphasis on CCR outline a series of graduation requirements to ensure high school

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<sup>22</sup> MCSA Website: Community Strategic Plan.

<sup>23</sup> MCSA Website: “Curriculum”

students are exposed to a wide range of academic subjects. These requirements, in conjunction with the aforementioned goals, help determine the types of courses offered each year at each school.

### *Graduation Requirements*

When considering how military-connected high schools overseas make room for music ensembles in the curriculum for students, one should consider the overall high school graduation requirements for all schools in this system. These graduation requirements place emphasis on skills related to language arts and mathematics, as outlined in the curriculum for CCR. There are fewer provisions made for an incorporation of the arts. All students in the class of 2019 and later are required to complete a total of 1.0 fine arts credits. This category includes any “Course in visual arts, music, theater, and/or humanities.”<sup>24</sup> “Humanities” is defined as

“...An interdisciplinary study of history, literature, language, philosophy, the visual arts, theatre, dance, and music. Emphasis is placed on critical thinking, creativity, and the rights and responsibilities of the individual in a society. Students engage in activities that focus on theater, music, visual arts, dance, architecture, film, and television.”<sup>25</sup>

Despite the broad range of topics, “Humanities” is defined as an interdisciplinary course which incorporates music among other arts disciplines. However, the focus in humanities as implemented by MCSA schools is in developing a sense of one’s role in the world. Music ensemble courses offer students different but equally engaging experiences in cooperation and collaboration, in addition to the many cognitive areas engaged by music study.

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<sup>24</sup> MCSA Website: “Music Education Standards”

<sup>25</sup> MCSA Website: “Curriculum”

The requirement is the same for the classes of 2014 through 2018 as well. 1.0 credit is the equivalent of a full year or two semesters of courses in this category. Although music is included as an option for fulfilling this requirement, there is no specific graduation requirement for music study listed by MCSA. This issue is not one which only applies to MCSA curriculum. In fact, most state education departments in the USA set graduation requirements for the entire state. Very rarely do these requirements include a specific consideration for incorporating music study. (See Appendix 2: Table 2)

The potential implications of MCSA standards include the possibility that students in these overseas military high schools may graduate without participating in a high school-level music ensemble. A student might stop all engagement in music education as early as elementary or middle school. This is not a concern limited only to MCSA schools. It does beg the question, however, whether or not standards work in the same way for music education as they do for other academic subjects. Since music is not recognized as a separate core academic subject, it is possible that schools under the above regulations would not be required to provide music course offerings to high school students, nor would high school students be particularly motivated to enroll. This gap in regulations is important to keep in mind when examining music programs in these and other schools.

### *Fine Arts and Music Standards*

Standards for fine arts and, specifically, music are developed at the MCSA level and set expectations for music coursework in District B schools. MCSA outlines an overarching set of standards for Arts as a subject according to expectations prescribed

by College and Career Readiness (CCR). In addition to the high school overall standards for music and Fine Arts, MCSA adapts College and Career Readiness tenets to provide standards for multiple categories of music study, to include “Composition and Theory”, “General Music”, “Harmonizing Instruments”, “Music Technology”, and “Traditional and Emerging Ensembles.”<sup>26</sup> Outlines for each category include benchmarks for stages of proficiency at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The focus of this study was the standards prescribed for “Traditional and Emerging Music Ensembles.” There are four areas of learning which form the basis of music standards at the national level: “Creating”, “Performing”, “Responding”, and “Connecting.” For each area there are anchor standards, each of which includes three levels of competency for high school students: “Proficient”, “Accomplished”, and “Advanced.”

For music education at the high school level, MCSA also lists two sets of separate expectations for music curriculum in grades 9-12: “normal” and “advanced.” Advanced is listed as outlining curriculum for grades 10-12. It is unclear why this distinction is made. Each set of standards includes 7 strands of expectations related to specific areas of music skills. MCSA refers to these strands as “Content Standards” and they each include three or more goals defined as “Achievement Standards.”<sup>27</sup> These requirements specify not only what students in military-connected high school music programs should understand, but also what they should be able to do in terms of practical music skills. They appear to be a way for MCSA to narrow the focus of music courses toward specific, assessable skills for students to practice.

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<sup>26</sup> MCSA Website: Curriculum, Fine Arts, Standards

<sup>27</sup> MCSA Website: Curriculum, Fine Arts, Programs, Music, Music Standards

Like the standards outlined by the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) and the National Core Art Standards (NCAS), MCSA's Fine Arts strands are organized under four types of learning stated above. These standards are based primarily on, and used in conjunction with, the NCAS.<sup>28</sup> Another similarity between MCSA standards and the national standards is that they do not delineate how music is to be incorporated into the course offerings of the schools which utilize them. Rather, they provide an outline of what should be accomplished in the music classroom, assuming a student remains involved in music through elementary, middle, and high school. While standards indicate guidelines for the quality of a music program, they make no provisions for the existence of the music program itself, nor any expectations that students will participate in such programs beyond 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

The concern that students may end involvement in music at an early age is not limited to District B schools, as the NAfME standards provide the same level of guidance for how music is to be incorporated in the education of each student. At the national level, music standards set high expectations for students and teachers in the music classroom, but these standards will only affect those students who participate. They define levels of proficiency in music, but they do not outline a suggested number or range of music courses to be offered within school systems. The same is true for standards in military-connected schools both domestic and overseas.

The MCSA music standards indicate a substantial list of invaluable skills which students may learn if they enroll in music ensembles. These may assist instructors and administrators in structuring music ensemble programs to meet the needs of their

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<sup>28</sup> MCSA Website, Curriculum, Fine Arts, Standards

students. When adhered to, national standards help to ensure students get the most out of their experience with music as part of a well-rounded education. However, students must first be given the opportunity; that is, music ensembles must be accessible for all students through high school. The priorities outlined in the curriculum, goals, and standards stated above demonstrate a need for music as part of preparing students to become successful individuals beyond high school.

### *Music Course Offerings across Military-Connected High Schools*

Finally, before discussing data directly concerning District B schools, it seems relevant to also consider what subjects pertaining to music are offered across all military-connected high schools. This includes all courses covering music study, as well as the types of ensemble courses which schools under MCSA could potentially provide, according to the master schedule. This pertains back to what this research is about: music opportunities made available to military dependents through military-connected schools. Music content areas covered by MCSA include the traditional ensembles, as well as two levels of piano and guitar, electronic music, music appreciation, music theory, and even jazz ensembles. Together, these courses suggest a well-rounded curriculum for music education in MCSA. Thus, while students may not experience all of the benefits provided by ensemble courses, they may yet participate in music in some form. Furthermore, these course offerings are a testament to MCSA's commitment to academic excellence through music.

## **Data on Individual Schools in District B**

The priorities reflected in MCSA's approaches to standards discussed above do not appear to be clearly reflected in the data discussed in this section. The results of this research reveal a great deal of variability from school to school in terms of the number and types of ensembles offered. Numbers for each ensemble from school to school were widely inconsistent. However, each school under District B does offer some form of music ensemble, an impressive accomplishment for so large a district spread across so many regions of the world. This does not take into account general music and music appreciation or theory courses which are also offered. Furthermore, all but one of the high schools under District B show as offering at least one band and one choir, though not always more than one of each.

Band appears to be the most prevalent offering in District B, with a total of 62 courses advertised across the 19 schools. Choirs are second, with 47 course offerings and strings list only 13 course offerings across high schools without middle school populations. Only 52% of the high schools studied offer some form of strings program. (See Appendix 1: Table 1) The low results for strings may not be related to standards or expectations set by MCSA, and be caused by other underlying issues, such as instrument availability, student interest, and instructor specialty. The exact reason is unclear.

Choir and band programs tend to have more offerings, though the number of programs still varies widely from school to school. Approximately 95% of schools offer some kind of choir, and all the schools studied offer band. 42% of these schools were also able to offer band at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced level. In contrast,

none of the high schools in this set offer all three levels of choir. However, some may offer courses in each area of music which are categorized as “not specified”, so singers may be able to participate at multiple levels at those schools. Additionally, though there is no clear indication of this, the absence of intermediate choir listings suggests that this ensemble may only be specified at two levels, beginning and advanced. The school with the highest number of programs, DB1, offers 11 courses: 4 choirs, 5 bands, and 2 strings classes. The lowest number of ensembles offered is 4 programs, and this occurs at multiple schools in the data set.

As for music faculty, no school in this data set currently employs more than two music instructors, and only about 37% of the schools have two instructors. Not surprisingly, this does appear to impact how many programs are offered, as the schools with two instructors tend to have more ensemble course offerings. However, despite the number of instructors hired, almost all of the 12 schools with only one instructor offer both band and choir and 5 of these offer strings as well. The only exception was DB15, which offered 6 bands and no choir or strings. Though inconsistent, the data set is still an impressive reflection for a school district facing so many variables and obstacles.

## **V. Discussion of Data**

The three main questions driving this research were: 1) Are there standards set by the administration overseeing these schools which directly require or affect inclusion of music course offerings in the schools? 2) Do all military-connected high schools offer band, choir, and strings courses? 3) Are courses offered at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced level at each school? Overall, the data suggest that the answer to each research question for this investigation is “no.” However, music still appears to have a significant place within District B schools. The data in the previous section appear scattered, but also surprising. The MCSA standards and graduation requirements present few ways of specifying a requirement for the inclusion of music coursework. This is also a prevalent issue in the United States, as will be examined herein. However, the data on the schools themselves reveal unexpected patterns regarding the way in which music appears to be prioritized. According to the numbers of programs, the schools do not meet all of the parameters specified in the research questions. They do, however, still provide many musical opportunities, despite minimal guidance from the MCSA standards.

### **MCSA and Non-Military State Graduation Requirements**

The MCSA music standards do not specify the numbers, levels, or types of ensembles which should be offered in District B schools. However, they demonstrate MCSA’s commitment to a high quality of curriculum in the music classroom itself. This is also true in non-military schools, with regard to the National Standards for music education. For now, however, it is worthwhile to first focus on MCSA graduation

requirements with regard to music courses in District B schools. The credit requirements for fine arts prove to be an area where MCSA excels in specifying the importance of music in terms of course offerings when compared with stateside departments of education. The specificity is twofold: first, “fine arts” is distinguished from other academic categories, and second, one full credit, that is, one year of study in fine arts, is required. To understand the significance of the specificity with which MCSA outlines fine arts requirements, one need only look at some of the non-military graduation requirements at the state level in the USA. First, a review of the definition of “fine arts” according to MCSA is needed. MCSA refers to courses which satisfy fine arts requirements as any “course in visual arts, music, theater, and/or humanities.” (See *Graduation Requirements*, pg. 27) This is a broad range of subjects for supporting music specifically, but classifying music among fine arts exclusively, without other unrelated subjects to substitute for music coursework, leads to a more established place in the curriculum for music.

In order to place these expectations in a larger context of education in the United States outside the military, the researcher investigated state-level requirements which specify fine arts in a similar way. First and most revealing, according to data compiled by the Education Commission of the States, only 34 states list art credits as required for graduation. Of these, 15 categorize “arts” with a combination of other subjects, such as foreign language study and technical or vocational education. Only 19 states specify a separate arts requirement.<sup>29</sup> Thus, only a little more than 38% of state education departments require students to participate in fine arts coursework, making the

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<sup>29</sup> “Standard High School Graduation Requirements (50-State)” Education Commission of the States. (Accessed 29 January 2018)

likelihood of music's prevalence in non-military American schools low when compared with District B schools. The data collected from District B show that MCSA graduation requirements, whether intentionally or not, probably have a positive impact on the inclusion of music in the curriculum. The presence of music ensembles in some form in every District B high school (that is, those high schools not combined with middle or elementary schools) is a phenomenon that warrants recognition.

Another data point to be noted is the number of arts credits required of high school students under MCSA and, therefore, District B. MCSA requires 1 full credit of fine arts, meaning two full semesters of coursework in music, should students choose music to fulfill the requirement. In this respect, MCSA is comparable to non-military education departments. Of the 19 states used for this comparison, none of these require more than one full credit of fine arts, and only Washington D.C. specifies that .5 of the 1 credit is to be put toward music coursework, with the other .5 completed in visual arts.

Specificity of standards, while helpful, is not always completely effective. The specification of one full year of required fine arts study does not guarantee that a student will choose to pursue music for a year to satisfy this requirement. However, if a student begins the year enrolled in a music ensemble course, they may decide to continue to study music, if only to meet the full arts requirement. This may in turn give students the opportunity to discover an interest in music not previously explored.

Thus, participating in a music class for one full year becomes more than an extracurricular activity or an elective course taken just for fun; it is an academic accomplishment and a step toward graduating from high school and preparing for college. This aligns with MCSA's commitment to College Career Readiness standards,

as well. When schools and students consider the positive effects of pursuing music on a student's preparation for college, CCR becomes yet another advocate for the inclusion of music in military-connected schools. Determining what effect state standards and requirements have on individual non-military school districts is an undertaking in research for another time; however, the data collected from District B may yet have something to say about the quality of standards and graduation requirements at the MCSA level.

### **Number of Instructors in District B Schools**

The number of instructors hired to teach music in each school is yet another potential factor in the issues with which this researcher is concerned. Before delving deeper into a discussion about how the MCSA standards play a role in this issue, It is useful here to consider the impact which the number of music instructors may have on the number of courses offered. The average number of music courses offered by schools with only one instructor is approximately 5.7 courses. Schools with 2 instructors average 7.8. (See Appendix 3: Table 3) As is to be expected, the number of music instructors hired by each District B school correlates with how many courses are offered. The more instructors, the more hands to manage music ensembles, and the possibility of a broader range of expertise or experience. This may allow for more of each type of ensemble. It is important to consider this as yet another factor which determines to what extent music can be incorporated in the curriculum, both for District B schools and any schools that offer music ensembles courses.

The averages listed above fail to account for the larger programs run by only one instructor. For example, two schools which exceed the norm expressed by the data

present an exception. Despite the average for one-instructor schools being almost 6 courses, DB12's one instructor offers 9 ensembles in total. Additionally, DB17 has only one instructor but 10 ensemble course offerings listed. These can perhaps attest to the fact that more is at work in determining how many music courses each District B school can offer. Another data point which the number of instructors at each school fails to account for directly is the range of difficulty levels which each school can offer for each ensemble. If an instructor is limited by their schedule and unable to make room for all levels of an ensemble type, a District B school should then seek to hire an additional instructor in that subject area. It is then important to determine how standards might prioritize the need for multiple difficulty levels of each ensemble, thus determining the need (or lack thereof) for more music instructors in District B schools. Thus, the next question to be addressed is whether or not MCSA standards make music instruction at multiple levels a priority for District B schools.

### **MCSA Music Standards and National Music Standards**

The National Standards for music education published by NAFME outline five possible levels of achievement for high school ensemble courses: novice, intermediate, proficient, accomplished, and advanced. The MCSA standards for music do not specify levels of proficiency used to frame the expectations for student musicians. There are instead two levels of standards included for high school music students: one for 9-12 and one for 10-12 which is distinguished as an "advanced" level. MCSA does not specify the reason for this distinction. It is somewhat difficult to determine where these expectations fit in with those standards based on the NCAS and CCR. This is especially true because of the discrepancies in the number of difficulty tiers between each set of

standards. The two-tiered high-school music standards do not closely match with the structure of music coursework levels in District B schools, yet neither do the three-tiered CCR-based standards. As determined in the data section of this report, District B school music ensembles typically exist at either one level, two levels (beginning and advanced) or three levels (beginning, intermediate, and advanced). For choir, there are no intermediate choirs offered by the schools in this study, and for strings, there are only courses at unspecified levels of difficulty. Band programs do offer all three levels depending on the school. This might imply a broader range of skill level among band students in District B schools; a need which is met by a larger number of band courses than any other ensemble course in District B. It might also simply reflect a tradition of course sequencing specific to band courses in District B. Either way, the separation of band courses into three difficulty levels allows for the accommodation of students at a wider variety of skill levels. Including all three levels in District B course offerings prevents students from being turned away due to a lack of instruction at the appropriate level. MCSA's various sets of standards, however, conflict with one another and are likely a source of confusion regarding the levels at which music ensemble courses should be offered. If District B schools have no one clear set of guidelines laid out with respect to the number and types of courses which they should offer, it is unlikely that they will be expected to meet the needs of students at every level of learning. In the case of military-connected schools, it seems that more standards do not always mean greater clarity in terms of expectations for coursework.

Already one can observe a discrepancy in the expectations for band and choir with regard to meeting the needs of students at multiple difficulty levels in each musical

subject. Perhaps one reason for this is that there is no set expectation for students to meet standards at multiple skill levels as outlined by the MCSA music standards. The lack of scaffolding in the standards is another factor which threatens to weaken the structuring of music programs in school districts under MCSA. In District B schools, there is an added risk, one which affects the continuous musical education of District B students: when all levels of music study in each ensemble are not offered, military children face the possibility of being unable to continue studying an instrument at their level when their family is re-located in the middle of their education.

The variability in difficulty levels offered from school to school is also an issue with regard to the expectations laid out by MCSA in its Community Strategic Plan. The goal to create a “model, unified school system” is less likely to be met with such a broad, disparate range of music ensemble situations and structures from school to school. The CSP, however, does not specify in its main goals how continuity of curriculum plays a role in ensuring unity across the schools. It stands to reason, however, that a school system which makes efforts to allow for a student’s continuous and sequential education in all academic subjects, including music, will allow for greater unity across the whole system. Music is just one area in which improvements can be made in this regard.

There is plenty of room for improvement in District B music ensemble course offerings. Take, for example, the apparent plight of choral programs in District B schools. No intermediate choir courses are offered, either by District B or by any other MCSA schools, and five of these District B schools offer chorus at the advanced level but not beginning. A student entering high school wanting to begin choir for the first

time might be unable to do so. The problem is even greater for string players, who are unlikely to be guaranteed courses which meet the needs of every level of student.

Strings are only offered at a general, unspecified level, and only sparingly.

District B schools face a similar though evidently less difficult challenge with meeting the needs of band students as well. For instance, only 10 of the 19 schools in the study offer beginning band. Once again, should a student decide to begin playing an instrument for the first time, they may not have the opportunity, depending on where a family is stationed. This, if nothing else, is an important reason to consider whether or not standards provide a framework which encourages the inclusion of multiple levels of music study in the curriculum. It is one of the many roles of standards to create consistent expectations for quality and extent of education. In a school system which supports high mobility student populations, it would seem even more important to provide as much continuity as possible in the curriculum, as well as the school environment itself.

Regarding continuity across schools and subjects, it is interesting to observe the differences in how band and choir appear to be offered in District B schools. Not only are there almost twice as many bands as choirs offered by District B high schools, but the difficulty level for each band is specified. This is not always the case with choir, which has several courses falling under the “not specified” category. Do these courses meet a set of music standards set by MCSA? The answer is unclear. These could be show choirs or choirs which do not follow more traditional patterns of choral classes. Nonetheless, it is difficult to measure to what extent ensembles are meeting the criteria

in the MCSA and National standards if the levels of standards which the ensembles seek to meet are not explicitly stated.

Another important point is that the standards at both the national level and under MCSA cover a long list of useful skills and understandings pertaining to music performance, literacy, composition, analysis, and improvisation, to name a few. One could hardly expect an instructor to cover all of these standards if they only teach students for one semester in one ensemble setting. Musicianship is an ongoing process; one with a plethora of benefits offered to the student. But it is one which takes time and multiple opportunities to explore while participating in music. Thus, the course offerings, as well as the level at which they are offered should reflect the expectations set by standards. Likewise, the standards should help outline a place for more music opportunities to ensure that students get the most out of studying music in an ensemble setting.

## **VI. Conclusion**

While finding a school district that requires students to study music at the high school level in order to graduate is unlikely, MCSA shows a strong commitment to the arts by distinguishing them from other course categories. While this distinction does not directly guarantee that music will be offered in every school, it does demonstrate a commitment to music as an academic subject separate from other types of elective courses. The term 'elective' is not synonymous with 'extracurricular.' Rather, 'elective' indicates a choice among other academic options. The data reveals that District B offers a significant number of these opportunities so that a large number of students may elect to take advantage of the benefits afforded by music ensemble courses.

Furthermore, MCSA, like many state departments of education, proposes its own standards for music education. These are based in part on the national standards provided by the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), which include a guideline to most schools on what student musicians should achieve during their time in a successful music program. Thus, not only does MCSA insure a place for music among the fine arts in the curriculum, but it also demonstrates an attention to detail with regard to the quality of program, not just quantity. The difficulty here is that these standards are only effective in schools where music courses are offered. Standards cannot set expectations for courses which do not exist. They do, however, provide a more detailed sense of what students might expect to accomplish in the music classroom. The importance of these standards in light of music education in MCSA is that they may contribute to an awareness of the benefits and skills to be gained by students who are given the opportunity to participate in music ensembles.

That is not to say that MCSA standards could not benefit from re-evaluation as well. Specifically, MCSA standards list certain skill sets which students should acquire from music ensemble courses, but the stated skillsets do not imply how these skills benefit the student or how they may be practically applied in everyday life, yet another drawback in many of the standards set for music education. Standards for music differ from other academic standards like CCR and the Common Core in that they are recommendations for what student musicians should be able to do by the end of a high school music program, rather than as a requirement for graduation. Common core outlines levels of proficiency needed in math and language arts in order to be successful beyond high school. This then suggests that these are necessary subjects which in turn guarantees a place in the curriculum for related coursework. Schools determine what students should be able to achieve in curricular areas they deem necessary, and they so often fail to count music among those.

Indeed, the standards set by MCSA for how music should be included in the curriculum (e.g. graduation requirements) are hardly specific enough to insure a place for music in every District B school. However, the distinction of fine arts as a curricular category separate from subjects such as foreign language study and technical or vocational education already puts MCSA ahead of many state level graduation requirements in the United States. Many schools in the US combine these categories and some require less than 1 full credit. In the state of Michigan, students can even replace fine arts with additional credits in math or English. Narrowing this definition to only fine arts encourages students in the direction of music study. If they miss the target, they may yet move in the direction of theater or visual arts where many equally-

enriching intellectual treasures still await them, and where music may continue to play a role.

The prevalence of music course offerings in District B schools indicates that the graduation requirements at the MCSA level appear to allow for a great many musical opportunities for students overseas. It also reveals a sense of value placed on music ensembles in military-connected schools. Whether or not this is the intention behind the standards set for music in MCSA is indeterminable; yet the inclusion of music education in every District B school demonstrates a devotion to providing students with the opportunities and benefits of studying music.

Music may not be a priority in the curriculum, as it so rarely is elsewhere, but District B schools demonstrate a commitment to excellence by providing multiple music ensemble opportunities in some form in all the high schools in the data set. One may conclude that this commitment contributes to the documented average higher academic performance of District B students relative to their non-military stateside peers. Those District B schools which offer multiple levels and types of music ensembles provide students with a potential source of continuity amidst the challenges they face. Studying a musical instrument over time allows for a constant and ever-developing creative outlet through which students learn self-discipline, self-motivation, self-confidence, cooperation, collaboration and critical thinking skills. All of these might be transferred as healthy classroom and learning habits which likely contribute to District B's academic success. These skills also no doubt help students later in their studies and careers; these are, after all, desirable and necessary abilities for college and any functional workplace.

That being said, the lack of requirements for music programs in education is still an issue, both for military and non-military schools. Non-specific requirements for music courses not only impede the inclusion of music in the curriculum, but also risk designating music as an extracurricular and non-academic subject. Nothing could be further from the truth about music education.

Quality music ensemble courses, especially, provide students with an environment where they can grow intellectually both as musicians and as responsible, well-rounded citizens of the world. This world is very much in need of greater understanding and cooperation among its members. Music is one effective way in which students may develop these values and carry them with them long after high school. They need only be given the opportunity to participate.

I now return to my initial question: “Do all Military School District B high schools offer music ensembles at every difficulty level? The answer is no, but not necessarily because of a failure to meet expectations set by MCSA. In fact, District B schools exceed many of these expectations by providing multiple band and choir ensembles at nearly every high school. Most of these schools are able to offer at least two difficulty levels for at least its band ensembles. The sheer number of ensembles offered by each school indicates that District B is dedicated to accommodating student musicians.

The standards and requirements give very little direction as to what extent music ensembles should be offered in District B schools. This does not stop these high schools from offering at least one music ensemble opportunity for each school. District B may be scattered across multiple geographical regions, yet this commitment to music and,

through it, academic excellence, reflects on a school system which is very much united.

Military children may experience turmoil as they move from one country to another.

Through the prevalence of music in District B schools, however, students may expect at least one source of blessed continuity to see them through.

## Appendix 1: Table 1

Table 1: District B School Music Ensemble Course Offerings

School Identifier	Type of Music Class		
	Choir	Band	String
	Count	Count	Count
DB1	4	5	2
DB2	1	2	1
DB3	2	2	0
DB4	2	3	0
DB5	5	5	0
DB6	3	2	1
DB7	3	3	0
DB8	2	2	0
DB9	2	2	0
DB10	3	6	1
DB11	3	2	1
DB12	3	6	0
DB13	3	2	1
DB14	2	2	1
DB15	0	6	0
DB16	2	3	1
DB17	4	6	0
DB18	2	1	2
DB19	1	2	2
<b>Total in DB High Schools</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>13</b>

This table shows the total number of each ensemble type offered at each District B school. The last row provides the total number of each ensemble course offering for all of the schools in the data set.

## Appendix 2: Table 2

Table 2: District B

			Level of Course		
			Choir	Band	String
			Count	Count	Count
DB1	Level	Beginner	2	2	0
		Advanced	0	1	0
		Intermediate	0	2	0
		Not Specified	2	0	2
DB2	Level	Beginner	0	0	0
		Advanced	1	1	0
		Intermediate	0	1	0
		Not Specified	0	0	1
DB3	Level	Beginner	1	0	0
		Advanced	1	1	0
		Intermediate	0	1	0
		Not Specified	0	0	0
DB4	Level	Beginner	1	1	0
		Advanced	1	1	0
		Intermediate	0	1	0
		Not Specified	0	0	0
DB5	Level	Beginner	2	1	0
		Advanced	2	2	0
		Intermediate	0	2	0
		Not Specified	1	0	0
DB6	Level	Beginner	1	0	0

		Advanced	2	1	0
		Intermediate	0	1	0
		Not Specified	0	0	1
DB7	Level	Beginner	1	1	0
		Advanced	1	1	0
		Intermediate	0	1	0
		Not Specified	1	0	0
DB8	Level	Beginner	1	0	0
		Advanced	1	1	0
		Intermediate	0	1	0
		Not Specified	0	0	0
DB9	Level	Beginner	0	1	0
		Advanced	2	1	0
		Intermediate	0	0	0
		Not Specified	0	0	0
DB10	Level	Beginner	1	0	0
		Advanced	1	3	0
		Intermediate	0	3	0
		Not Specified	1	0	1
DB11	Level	Beginner	1	0	0
		Advanced	1	1	0
		Intermediate	0	1	0
		Not Specified	1	0	1
DB12	Level	Beginner	2	2	0
		Advanced	1	2	0
		Intermediate	0	2	0

		Not Specified	0	0	0
DB13	Level	Beginner	1	0	0
		Advanced	1	1	0
		Intermediate	0	1	0
		Not Specified	1	0	1
DB14	Level	Beginner	1	0	0
		Advanced	1	1	0
		Intermediate	0	1	0
		Not Specified	0	0	1
DB15	Level	Beginner	0	2	0
		Advanced	0	2	0
		Intermediate	0	2	0
		Not Specified	0	0	0
DB16	Level	Beginner	0	1	0
		Advanced	1	1	0
		Intermediate	0	1	0
		Not Specified	1	0	1
DB17	Level	Beginner	2	2	0
		Advanced	2	2	0
		Intermediate	0	2	0
		Not Specified	0	0	0
DB18	Level	Beginner	0	0	0
		Advanced	2	1	0
		Intermediate	0	0	0
		Not Specified	0	0	2
DB19	Level	Beginner	0	0	0

		Advanced	1	2	0
		Intermediate	0	0	0
		Not Specified	0	0	2

This table indicate the number of each type of ensemble course for each difficulty level in District B high schools. Three levels, Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced are listed. A fourth category, "Not Specified" is listed for courses for which no difficulty level is expressed in the course offering title as shown in the master schedule for each school.

### Appendix 3: Table 3

Table 1.C: District B School Music Instructors

School	Number of Music Teachers
DB1	2
DB2	1
DB3	1
DB4	1
DB5	2
DB6	2
DB7	2
DB8	1
DB9	1
DB10	2
DB11	2
DB12	1
DB13	1
DB14	1
DB15	1
DB16	2
DB 17	1
DB18	1
DB19	1

This table indicates the number of music instructors employed for each District B High school.

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