

Measurement & Evaluation

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Music Content of Select State-Mandated High School Achievement Tests*

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Within the last decade, several analyses of the quality of education in our nation's high schools have been offered (Adler, 1982; Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). One area that has been analyzed by all of the reports is that of high school test scores. These analyses have influenced political and public groups because of the public's perception that test scores serve as a definitive measure of the quality of education.

This perception of test scores has the potential to bring about significant changes in the way curricula are written. It is likely that high school administrators will design any curriculum with an eye toward improving test scores. In doing so, they will exclude from these curricula subject matter not emphasized or not tested in favor of emphasizing content areas which are included in the standardized test with the hope of raising the school's mean test score.

Such an emphasis on test scores will lead the public to believe that the tests used include all that is thought important in the high school curriculum. This well-known assumption on the part of the public, and the favoritism of administrators towards stellar test scores, should lead music educators to believe that some base of testable musical knowledge must be expected of our students if the music program is to flourish and grow.

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A literature review by the author revealed three areas of research related to curriculum construction in the arts: educational reform, student and public attitudes, and arts assessment. Among the findings were: (a) the national reports on education recommend that the arts should have a place (to a greater or lesser degree) in the high school curriculum; (b) students and parents value the arts but believe that their own school arts experiences were unsatisfactory; (c) teachers

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believe that music should not and/or cannot be tested, although they believe that testing itself is a good idea; (d) students are seldom required to enroll in an arts course; (e) testing in music as part of state-mandated high school testing has been limited.

An eight item telephone interview guide based on the format and content of similar surveys by Kaufman (1979), Pipho (1980), the Education Commission of the States (1981), and Roeber (1988a) was designed by the author. A roster of the directors of state assessment programs was obtained from Roeber (1988b) in order to identify individuals from whom valid data could be collected on the musical knowledge expected of students on state-mandated high school achievement tests.

Findings indicated that 40 of the 50 states (80%) had a state-mandated high school testing program. Alaska, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Wyoming did not require achievement testing of high school students.

The test instruments used in the 40 states that required testing were similar. Six different national tests were in use. Twenty respondents (50%) reported the use of state developed instruments.

Tests were administered in grade 11 in 47.5% of the 40 states. Other popular choices were grades 10 (27.5%) and 12 (20%). Only Georgia and Louisiana tested in grade 9.

All students are tested in 38 of the 40 states. Colorado and Utah sample. Minnesota school districts are free to elect to test all of their students or to test a sample population because of the wide disparity in school district size in Minnesota.

Obtaining the number of test items in each subject area tested enabled the investigator to determine: (a) the percentage of test questions that required musical knowledge, and (b) the percentage of the test devoted to each subject area. Only Maine, Minnesota, and

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Utah reported state-mandated testing in music for high school students. Minnesota’s music testing program was the most substantial. In that state music items were allotted the same, if not a greater percentage of the test (19.9%) as all other subject areas. Maine’s music items comprised 1.7% of the test. Utah allotted .01% of the total test to music items.

The music tests seemed to be limited in format and content. In Maine and Utah only the students’ cognitive abilities were tested. Minnesota was the only state that used items which measured aural ability, although the assessment offices in Maine and Utah reported that they would like to make such an addition to their test battery.

With half of the states developing their own tests, the choice of subject areas tested is likely an

indication of what is valued in that state. The research literature also suggests that test content and the perceived importance of subject matter are related. Pipho (1980) found that reading was the subject area most frequently tested, but the results of this study indicate that mathematics is now the subject most emphasized. It is likely that this change is due to the recent political and business concern about falling scores in mathematics.

In a second example of the relationship between curriculum and testing, a representative of the Institute for Behavioral Research in Creativity (the organization that developed Utah’s testing program) reported that the number of music

items on the state’s test had been reduced from 21 to 5 as a result of legislative cuts in class time for art and music programs. Most assuredly public and political concerns have influenced what is included on state-mandated high school achievement tests.

The small number of states that test music achievement would seem to indicate that music is perceived as being less important than such “basics” as mathematics, science, and English. This conclusion is supported by these premises:

1. Areas of study which are perceived to be important and are tested have specific horizontally and vertically articulated curricula designed for students.
2. The limited experience of music teachers with testing may indicate an unease about the results of their instruction.



3. High school music curricula have historically been oriented toward aiding those students interested in performance, a subject which lends itself less well to multiple choice testing.

These issues are interdependent. For example, it is likely that the performance orientation of music in high schools directly impacts on the design of the curriculum, a curriculum which limits the number of students served. Required testing in music would likely spur development of a music curriculum appropriate for all students.

“The music teacher is in a dilemma: Test more thoroughly and gain more status in the high school program, or test to a lesser extent and receive a diminishing share of available resources.”

The music teacher is in a dilemma: Test more thoroughly and gain more status in the high school program, or test to a lesser extent and receive a diminishing share of available resources. If we opt for testing, one approach is to work to influence the number of states which mandate testing in music. Although this is sometimes viewed as a backward approach, the present importance of testing cannot be ignored. Circumstances may indicate that 1990 is an optimum time to encourage state-mandated testing in music as a means of focusing the public's attention on the value of music in the high school curriculum for all students. As novices in this area, the following needs appear to be important:

1. More specific information is needed on the perceived importance and purpose of testing. Kaufman

(1979) began to explore these issues in his study by asking where test results are sent (e.g., the state legislature, parents, newspapers) and for what uses they are intended (e.g., distribution of funds, curriculum accountability, diagnosis)?

2. The elimination of the factors music teachers perceive as obstacles to testing in the arts must be pursued. One such obstacle is the notion that there is a lack of quality music test items. This problem may be addressed by determining what level of teacher awareness exists concerning possi-

ble sources of help in developing tests, such as: (a) the National Assessment of Educational Progress, (b) the three states which presently test music in high school, and (c) standardized music tests.

3. Finally, more complete information must be obtained from those states which have devised formal curriculum guides containing a logical sequence of learning objectives. This information would have a direct bearing on our ability to select appropriate tests.

Addressing these three issues may encourage the expansion of testing in the subject area of music. Expanded testing may result in music curricula that are broader in scope and encourage more student involvement. If expanded testing occurs, it is more likely that music may be perceived as an important area of study within the high school curriculum.

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The Editors' Desk

Doctoral dissertations enjoy prominent reporting and review in such venerable publications as *CRME* and *JRME*, yet Masters theses go largely unreported. It is likely that there is a wealth of information which goes unused simply because there is no publication whose purpose is to publish articles which report on or review Masters theses.

A partial solution is to offer space in the SRIG newsletters to authors of Masters theses. Articles may be submitted to a regional representative or the editorial office here at UNC. If you have further thoughts about this proposal please let us know. As always, other articles pertaining to measurement and evaluation will be welcome.

The national meeting of the Measurement and Evaluation SRIG will take place on Thursday, March 29, from 12:30 pm to 1:45 pm in the Warren Room of the Sheraton Washington Hotel.

Guests will be teachers and students from Pittsburgh demonstrating performance based evaluation through *Arts Propel*, a collaboration between Harvard Project Zero, the Educational Testing Service, and the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Panelists will include Pittsburgh Public School personnel, along with Lyle Davidson and Larry Scripp from Harvard Project Zero.

MERC Notes

There are a number of regional and at-large positions to be filled on

the MERC Executive Council this year. The Council asks your assistance in proposing nominations for these positions. After checking with the individual to determine interest, send your nominations and the nominee's professional vita to:

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