

America Arts for All: Promoting Musical Opportunity and Equity for Socioeconomically Challenged Students



Sydney Amos, Bachelor of Music Education Program
Mentored by Dr. Daniel Koehn, Eastern Kentucky University School of Music

Abstract

America Arts for All examines the student benefits of being involved in the Central Music Academy, a program that provides free music lessons to students on free or reduced lunch. Some of the benefits their program specifically realizes are higher graduation and college entry rates as well as higher interest in and knowledge of music in comparison to their general public school peers.

Low-income students are significantly under-represented in music programs across the nation because they cannot afford instruments or program fees or because they feel that they cannot compete with their more socioeconomically privileged peers. Examination of the student benefits of Central Music Academy provides ample evidence in favor of involving students in music who might otherwise be unable to participate.

Introduction

Students from low-income homes are significantly underrepresented in music programs nationwide. Because students from low-income households are not provided as many musical opportunities as their more economically privileged peers, these students are less involved, less likely to compete musically, less likely to place in higher chairs in ensembles, and less likely to pursue music in the long term. However, these students are just as capable as their peers of developing musical talent and aptitude. The goal of this project is to see if, when given similar opportunities as their more socioeconomically privileged peers, students from low-income homes become more involved and more successful in music, as well as in other areas of their lives.

The Central Music Academy of Lexington, KY acts as a case study for this project. The Central Music Academy provides free music lessons to any student between the ages of eight and eighteen who receives free or reduced lunch. They offer lessons for a wide variety of instruments, and the music instruction is tailored to each individual student. Their mission is to provide quality musical training at no cost to financially disadvantaged children. CMA seeks to use the power of music and musical instruction to improve the lives of these at-risk youths. Their long-term goal is to strengthen their community by reaching one child at a time.

CMA has provided free music lessons for over 1000 financially disadvantaged students since 2004. The students who take lessons at the Central Music Academy also have a 100% high school graduation rate, in comparison to Fayette County's average rate of 90.5%. In addition, 99% of CMA's students continue on to college after graduation. It is clear that the strategy implemented at the Central Music Academy is making a difference in their students' lives. The question is, how exactly do these students benefit from this extramusical opportunity, and is it closing the music equity gap for low-income students? Programs like the Central Music Academy of Lexington, KY that provide extrinsic musical opportunities, such as private music lessons, for students from low-income homes could help close the socioeconomic musical gap that low-income students face and provide a more equitable music education for these students.

Methods and Materials

One of the most impactful sources for this project was "High School Ensemble Students in the United States: A Demographic Profile," by Kenneth Elpus and Carlos R. Abril, a demographic study of who is involved in music ensembles in public schools and why.

Another important source was a project by Jihae Shin that surveyed students who were involved in a summer music program to see how they were impacted.

In order to gauge how students benefit from music lessons with the Central Music Academy, we interviewed roughly 25% of their student and teacher population. Our questions ranged from how they have improved academically, socially and musically, to what they feel their biggest motivators are, to how their interest in music has grown overtime.

Results

The student survey results show that students feel more musically knowledgeable and intend to stay involved in music as a result of taking lessons with CMA. The results also show growth in self awareness, motivation, and feelings of fulfillment.

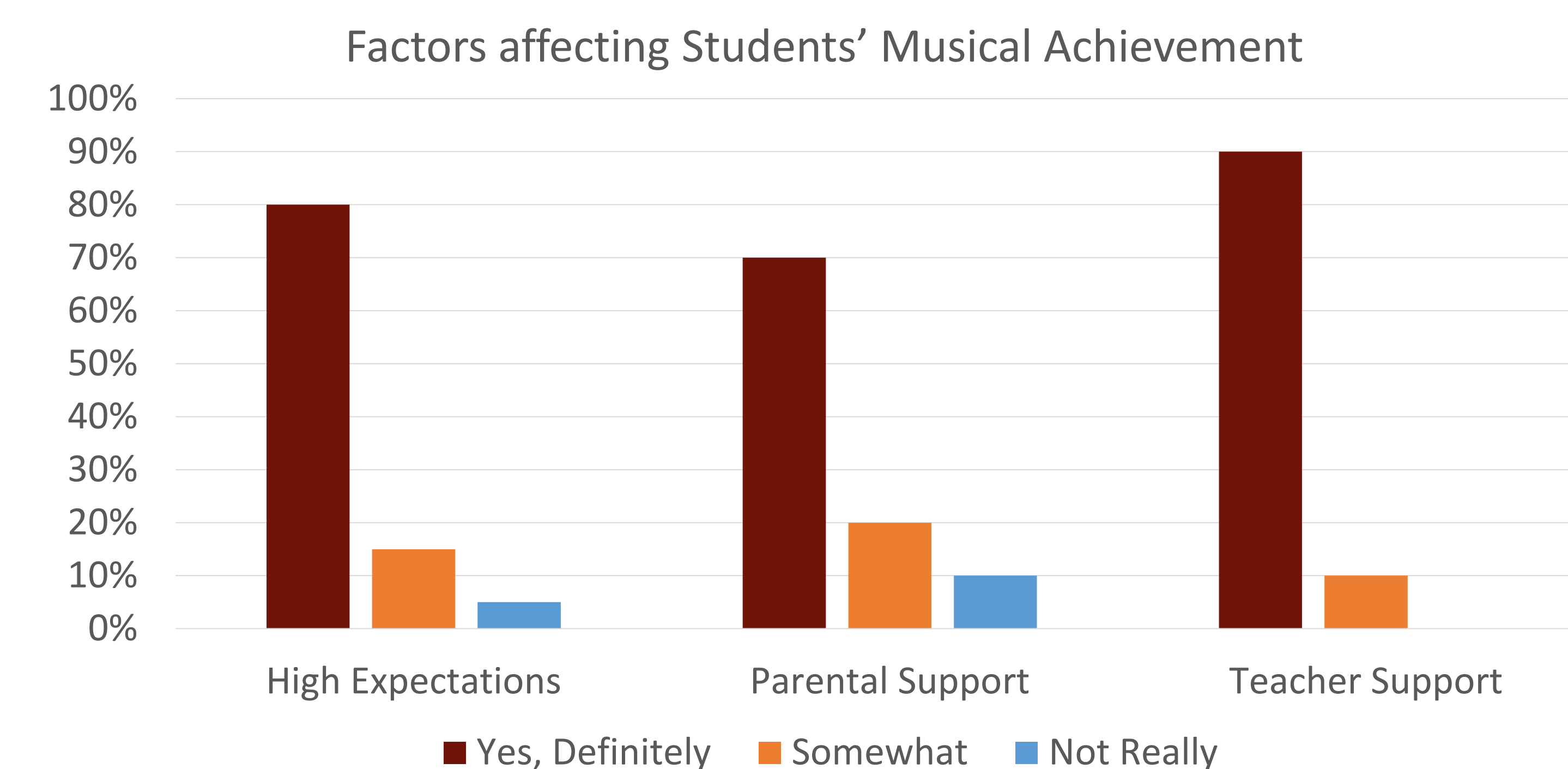
Additionally, 80% of students feel that they are held to a high standard of excellence, and their teachers see growth in almost all of their students on a regular basis. When students are challenged and held to high expectations, they are more likely to succeed. This project is just one example of this.

To our surprise, we did not see much academic growth with this group of students, nor did the students feel increasingly happier as a result of taking lessons. Very few students stated that they planned to pursue a career in music.

However, 100% of students stated that taking music lessons was a meaningful part of their lives.

Table 1. As a result of taking music lessons with CMA:

	Yes, Definitely	Somewhat	Not Really
Feels they will stay musically involved	85%	15%	0%
Feels more musically informed	94.74%	5.26%	0%
More self aware	70%	25%	5%
Increased motivation	80%	15%	5%
Held to a high standard of excellence	80%	15%	5%
Feelings of fulfillment through music	70%	30%	0%



Discussion

- Students from low-income homes are significantly underrepresented in public school music programs nationwide
- Students from low-income homes are just as musically capable when given opportunities to explore and grow as musicians
- Holding students to high expectations, and having strong parental and teacher support are 3 important factors that affect student achievement
- 85% of CMA students feel they will stay involved in music in some way as a result of taking music lessons
- 90% of CMA students feel more musically informed as a result of taking music lessons
- Students feel more motivated and express feelings of appreciation for the opportunity to take lessons.

Conclusions

Many of the students that take music lessons with CMA are very musically involved in a variety of ensembles, competitions, and other musical endeavors.

These students seem to take their music education seriously and appreciate the opportunity to improve their musical abilities.

The students with CMA see improvements in their lives musically and throughout other areas such as self awareness and motivation. It is clear that providing free music lessons to socioeconomically disadvantaged students, when given high expectations and plenty of support, allows students to be more musically educated, resulting in more well-rounded music education.

Contact

Sydney Amos
Eastern Kentucky University
sydney_amos4@mymail.eku.edu
(270) 735-3675

Dr. Daniel Koehn
Eastern Kentucky University
School of Music Voice Faculty
daniel.koehn@eku.edu

References

- Elpus, Kenneth, and Abril, Carlos R. "High School Music Ensemble Students in the United States: A Demographic Profile." *Journal of Research in Music Education* Vol. 59, No. 2 (July 2011): 128-145.
- Shaw, Julia T. "Toward Socially Inclusive Music Organizations: Promoting Socioeconomic Diversity In Choral Ensembles." *The Choral Journal* Vol. 58, No. 4 (November 2017): 22-37.
- Shin, Jahae. "An Investigation of Participation in Weekly Music Workshops and Its Relationship to Academic Self-Concept and Self-Esteem of Middle School Students in Low-Income Communities." *Contributions to Music Education* Vol. 38, No. 2 (2011): 29-42.