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SPECIAL SEGMENT ON VISION 2020
AND THE FUTURE OF MUSIC EDUCATION

A Look Ahead:
Music Education from 2020 to 2050

Vision 2020 offered a thoughtful review of the recent history of music education and an overview of its current state together with projections and questions about its future. Now that 2020 has arrived, and we are undertaking a similar review in this publication, it seems appropriate to consider once again what music education might look like in the coming years. This article examines issues of funding, technology, professional development, curriculum, outreach, standards, and support, as well as the roles of teachers and policymakers. With a history of more than 65 years in the field, Paul R. Lehman, is a professor emeritus of music at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. From 1984 to 1986 he served as president of the Music Educators National Conference, now the National Association for Music Education. He was the author of the chapter “How Can the Skills Called for in the National Standards Best Be Taught?” in the original *Vision 2020* Report.

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Background

In reviewing *Vision 2020* many observers will be struck by how little has changed since the Housewright Symposium with respect to the goals and objectives of music education. The ideals embodied in the Housewright Declaration are as valid today as they were in 1999. And they're not fundamentally different from the ideals embodied in the other goals statements of our profession dating from earlier years. They're also as elusive as ever.

Similarly, the obstacles we music educators face in the day-to-day struggle to achieve our goals remain remarkably constant as well. We battle for the instructional time we need to do our jobs. We battle for the necessary materials and equipment and administrative support. We battle to ensure that music is recognized as belonging among the basic disciplines at the core of the K-12 curriculum. We may sometimes find these never-ending skirmishes to be disheartening, but experience teaches us that they are simply unavoidable accompaniments to our work and they must be dealt with.

Shaping the Future

So what can we expect as we look ahead to, say, 2050? In contemplating the future we cannot merely sit back and guess what it will bring. Instead, we must decide what we want it to bring, and then work to make our vision a reality. In other words, we must act to shape the future in the direction we want rather than let others shape it for us. This is true of educators in general and of music educators in particular. In an ideal world educational practice would be driven by carefully thought-out, research-based policies, but too often it is driven instead by a mishmash of tradition, conflicting pressures, and personal biases on the part of education decision makers. In these remarks I am not simply predicting what might happen; instead, I am suggesting what we should work to make happen. This is an important distinction, as Michael Mark points out in *Vision 2020*.¹

First of all, we must recognize that music education is inescapably affected by the endless barrage of bickering, discord, and crises that continuously impact all of K-12 education. Education, unfortunately, is doomed permanently to remain a victim of political controversy because it is governed and supported through our political processes. Politicians, who may look to knowledgeable experts for guidance in regulating other professions, such as medicine and law, often do not do so in education because they believe that they, with at least 12 years of experience in education, are experts themselves. And those who are elected to office are able to implement their ideas no matter how misguided those ideas may be.

Legislators frequently show no reluctance to establish requirements regarding standards, curriculum, textbook selection, assessment, discipline, and so forth regardless of their lack of in-depth knowledge of these issues. As a result, instead of following practices based on evidence and expertise, we too often stumble along, beguiled first by one faddish delusion and then another, sometimes changing direction after every election. Educators too are occasionally guilty of placing excessive faith in popular fashions or in innovation for its own sake.

We can also expect, of course, that our schools will continue to be buffeted about by the stubborn, relentless ills that afflict all of society, including crime, poverty, violence, and substance abuse. These ordeals, and whatever others may arise in the future, must be addressed not only by educators but also by all of our social and governmental institutions at every level.

Funding Education

As we consider the outlook for education between 2020 and 2050, there are three issues in particular that should figure prominently in our thinking: (1) funding, (2) technology, and (3) professional development. Perhaps the single most difficult challenge confronting American K-12 education today is our persistent, widespread, and shameful refusal to provide adequate financial support to our schools on a dependable, continuing basis. As I have claimed earlier in this journal:

Any thoughtful analysis of the long-term needs of society has to place a well-educated public near the top of our list of priorities. But in recent years, all across the nation, we've seen education budgets cut and teachers laid off. We need more teachers, not fewer. We ought to be spending more for education, not less. Cutting budgets for education is an act of mind-boggling shortsightedness. It's institutional irresponsibility masquerading as fiscal discipline.²

High-quality education cannot be held hostage to budgetary uncertainty or dependent on a precarious array of special elections, especially when the public is ambivalent regarding its priorities as a result of clashing demands from every corner. The growth of charter schools has thrust issues of school funding further into the political arena, and the problems are compounded by obsolete funding formulas that take no account of the unique needs of certain schools or certain students.

Education suffered drastic cuts in funding during the recession of 2008, and the recovery has been painfully slow. By 2015, seven years after the worst of the crisis, 27 states were actually spending less for education in constant dollars per pupil than they were in 2008.³ As a nation, we were spending \$12,330 per pupil for K-12 education in 2015. At the same time, we were spending \$33,274 per convict to keep people in prison.⁴ So we were spending 2.7 times as much on each prisoner as we were spending on each student. Perhaps if we spent more on the latter there might be fewer of the former. A study by the Urban Institute found that our combined local, state, and federal spending that directly benefits Americans age 65 and older totals approximately \$30,000 per person, while our

spending that directly benefits Americans age 18 and younger totals \$14,400.⁵ That's a difference of more than two to one favoring the elderly. Are these the kind of figures we want in 2050?

Technology

There is probably no force with greater potential to transform education than technology. New electronic devices that make it easier for students to create, perform, and listen to music are appearing constantly. Technology can alter in profound and irreversible ways the means by which music is taught and learned in school just as it is altering in profound and irreversible ways the roles that music plays in peoples' lives outside the school. We should embrace those uses of technology that are helpful and minimize the impact of those that are not.

Despite the enormous potential of technology to reshape education, however, good teachers will remain indispensable to effective learning. The full effects of adolescents staring at computer screens and tapping endlessly at their phones are not yet clear, but it's evident already that schools must make special efforts in the future to humanize and personalize our technology-saturated environment if we're to restore the warmth and sensitivity that are found only in human interactions. Our personal relationships contribute in important ways to our overall well-being, and the arts are especially useful in helping us to develop those personal relationships.

When the printing press was introduced in Europe in the fifteenth century, teachers in the monastery and cathedral schools were alarmed that their jobs would disappear. If every student could have a book, they feared, there would be no need for teachers. That concern proved to be unfounded, but the role of the teacher changed profoundly, and despite the current revolution in technology teachers will continue to be the single most essential element in education. Only a teacher can ask just the right question. Only a teacher can provide just the right explanation. Only a teacher can help students to manage their intellectual growth within the context of the social and emotional problems they face. Above all, only a teacher can show respect and concern for a student. The potential of technology is immense, but it must always remain the servant of education and never allowed to drive the process.

Professional Development

Expanded professional development is an especially urgent prerequisite for improving education. Reaching our goals for 2050 will require massive new programs of high-quality in-service education for teachers each and every year for as long as they teach. Our present efforts in professional development fall pathetically short of what is needed in terms of quality, scope, and accessibility. Teachers may easily find themselves unable to respond to newly emerging needs because their academic training did not prepare them adequately for the unforeseen challenges they face.

We ought to have the same high level of expectations regarding professional development in education as have long been traditional in other professions, such as medicine. Although the requirements vary by state and by specialty, physicians are typically required to renew their certification every two to three years by completing a specified number of Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits. Sixteen states require 40 credits every two years, eight states require 80 credits, and 17 states require a whopping 100 credits.⁶ A CME credit represents one contact hour of education activity, so 100 credits represents more than 12 full eight-hour days.

The offering of CME courses and the awarding of credits is governed and authorized by the American Medical Association, the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education, and recognized state medical societies. CME activities may be delivered by various organizations, including professional associations, educational institutions, and hospitals. Classes may be offered online or in-person. It should be noted that, according to the National Institutes of Health, most hospitals mandate a specific number of credits required for their physicians to remain credentialed and to see patients in their facilities.⁷ If there were a similar procedure in education, school districts would create their own continuing education requirements for their teachers.

It is particularly significant that all of these requirements are established and administered by medical professionals and not by politicians or civil servants. Under a parallel procedure in education, the requirements for the renewal of teaching certificates would be established entirely by educators. The instruction would be offered by professional associations, colleges, universities, school districts, state or local education agencies, or other authorized groups, and the system would be controlled by a governing body established within the education profession. One of the basic characteristics of a profession is self-regulation.

Inevitably, the need for expanded and improved continuing professional development brings with it a variety of compelling obligations. Tomorrow's teachers will need not only the materials and equipment necessary to do their jobs,

but they will also need greater support in the form of research into the factors that affect learning. These include socio-economic issues, instructional materials and methods, school organization and administrative practices, resources available, parental education, school safety, learning disabilities, language barriers, and the ability and willingness of students to learn. In my opinion, the most fundamental of these factors is student motivation. If students are motivated they will learn. If they're motivated they can't be prevented from learning. But if they're not motivated it doesn't matter what the lesson plan says, it doesn't matter what the teacher does, and it doesn't matter how much expensive technology is used; the results will be disappointing.

There are other needs, of course, such as better ways to exchange information regarding best practices, but perhaps teachers' most urgent and immediate need is for more time. Teachers need time to plan, time to study, and time to think. They need time to assess student learning properly, time to help students with problems, and time to talk with parents. They need time to observe the teaching of experienced colleagues and discuss what they've seen. They need time to attend professional meetings. All of these needs must be addressed across the field of education if our schools are to be truly successful.

Music Education in 2050

In 1984, at my first meeting as president of NAFME with the group's National Executive Board, the Board adopted three goals for the year 1990. Goal 1 began with this manifesto:

By 1990, every student, K-12, shall have access to music instruction in school. The curriculum of every elementary and secondary school, public or private, shall include a balanced, comprehensive, and sequential program of music instruction taught by qualified teachers.⁸

(Goals 2 and 3, in brief, called for every high school to require a course in the arts for graduation and for every college and university to require a course in the arts for admission.)

We're still not there, but the fundamental principles underlying Goal 1 for 1990 are, in essence, the same principles that have guided our profession since the *Tanglewood Declaration* of 1967 and even earlier. They are the same principles codified in the *Goals and Objectives Project* of 1970, the National Music Standards of 1994, the *Housewright Declaration* of 1999, and the National Core Music Standards of 2014. In the intervening years we have made our intentions more explicit by providing additional details, but we have not altered our fundamental vision.

Education changes over time as society changes. Some changes occur quickly and others more slowly, but societal changes are inevitable and education must reflect those changes. In her introductory remarks in *Vision 2020*, June Hinckley tells us that the purpose of the Housewright Symposium was to help our profession to deal with the changes in society that had taken place since the Tanglewood Symposium and to prepare for the changes likely to occur in the future.⁹ The Symposium gave us an opportunity, she says, to think as idealists. That need is always present. We must never let ourselves become so wrapped up in our day-to-day responsibilities that we neglect to think about the future. Today the internet and social media make it ever easier to exchange ideas instantly with individuals and with large audiences, and we can use this capability to help us prepare, individually and collectively, for whatever conditions lie ahead. Our long-term objectives may remain unchanged, but our approaches and procedures should be reviewed regularly and updated as appropriate.

In addressing change music educators are fortunate in being able to rely on the strong, capable leadership provided by the National Association for Music Education, and the music curriculum of 2050 should reflect the particular language contained in the music standards endorsed by NAFME at that time. However, I see no need for substantive changes in our basic mission, and I anticipate none. Accordingly, I propose the following as a summary of our goals for 2050:

1. Every student at every level in every school will have access to a comprehensive, balanced, and sequential program of music instruction taught by qualified teachers and leading toward clearly defined skills and knowledge expressed in written standards.
2. Every student will receive instruction in performing, composing, improvising, listening to, and describing music, and the music curriculum will include representative works of diverse genres, styles, and cultures.
3. High-quality music instruction will be available to every person regardless of his or her age, gender, social status, geographic location, racial or ethnic identity, special needs, or talent.

This is an ambitious agenda. Can we achieve these goals by 2050? History offers scant cause for optimism. Time passes quickly and major changes usually come slowly, but that means simply that we must work harder. Critics may consider it unrealistic to imagine that in a mere three decades we can achieve the kind of music program we want everywhere in the nation, especially in disadvantaged and rural areas. Still, even though unblemished success is an elusive condition,

we must continually try to come ever closer to reaching the ideal scenario we envision. To lessen our efforts would be to betray our duty to future generations of American youth and abandon our commitment to improving the quality of life for our citizens.

Curriculum and Outreach

Let's consider what steps we can take to increase the likelihood of success. One crucial need is to reach more students. Although the figures vary widely by state and district, various studies over many years have suggested that typically only about 20 percent of the nation's high school students are enrolled in music courses. That's not enough. As we look around, there is overwhelming evidence on every hand that young people are interested in music. They're familiar with a wide variety of popular music and with all of the pop musicians. Many have organized their own performing groups. But too often there are no music courses available in school that meet their needs.

In order to expand our enrollment, we must first expand our curriculum. Every secondary school, regardless of size, should offer at least one music course open without prerequisites to all students. Potential offerings include guitar, keyboard, improvisation, composition, music theory, music history, music appreciation, electronic music, specialized small ensembles such as steel drums, and interdisciplinary arts courses. Ideally, a varied array of courses should be offered in successive semesters. All of these courses must be of high quality, and all must be built around the needs and interests of students while at the same time linked to relevant standards-based outcomes.

Our traditional large ensembles cannot be abandoned because they offer access to a vast repertoire of genuinely magnificent, time-tested music, but we should also find a place for new ensembles of traditional and non-traditional instruments. Digital ensembles present a particularly promising assortment of possibilities. Expanding our curriculum may require more teachers, but clear evidence of student interest in new offerings can be used to justify the increased staffing necessary.

If we are to achieve the goals proposed here for 2050, special efforts will be required to ensure that music instruction is made available in an equitable manner to all students regardless of where they live. It has long been painfully obvious that there are glaring inequities between the music programs available in affluent schools and those available in poorer districts, and it's long past time to end this morally inexcusable and socially devastating injustice. In some schools music simply isn't taught at all.

Forty-four states require instruction in the arts in elementary school, middle school, and high school,¹⁰ but too many schools are brazenly failing to meet their explicit legal obligations. Band, orchestra, and chorus alone, it can be argued, do not satisfy the intent of the requirement. One powerful reason is that band and orchestra generally require an extended period of prerequisite instrumental study. And all three groups typically require an extensive commitment of extracurricular time and a narrowly focused interest that cannot be expected of most students.

Suppose that a group of parents were to file a lawsuit to force compliance with the requirement to offer arts instruction. Teachers cannot do that but parents can. There are ample precedents for such action, and there are certainly law firms that would be glad to help on a *pro bono* basis. Some of these lawyers might be the parents of prospective arts students. A few well-chosen, highly publicized cases could have a dramatic effect. Even if the result were dropping the requirement, that would end the flagrant hypocrisy of pretending that students have access to arts courses when, in fact, they do not.

In short, the K-12 music curriculum I propose for 2050 is one that: (1) is available literally to every student in every school in the nation; (2) is based on carefully conceived written standards designed to enable every individual to participate fully in his or her musical culture; (3) encompasses a comprehensive and imaginative range of music activities and repertoire; (4) attracts a significantly larger percentage of the student population at the secondary level than is typical today; and (5) is taught by well-qualified teachers who are given sufficient time, materials, and support to do their jobs.

But let's not stop there. Let's think big. Let's try to ensure that by 2050 music instruction is available in one form or another not only to every K-12 student but to every person from infancy through retirement. This will involve coordination with the preschool and early childhood programs in our communities and also with the adult and continuing education programs. We should seize every opportunity to utilize fully all of the educational and social resources available and to work cooperatively with the existing institutions and organizations that can help. There is an especially important role here for community colleges.

This is a tall order. Success will require gaining the support not only of school administrators but of the general public as well. We may not accomplish all that we want in a mere 30 years. It may take longer, but our plans should be ambitious. These are goals worthy of our best effort.

The Hidden Usefulness of Standards

Written standards have many uses and serve many purposes. That's why they deserve our careful attention, and that's why their development requires significant time and effort. They must reflect not only the best thinking of our profession but also the expectations and aspirations of the communities they serve. And we must then take full advantage of the opportunities our standards provide.

Some uses of standards are obvious while others are less evident. What's most apparent is that our standards make our instructional expectations explicit. In so doing they provide a basis for developing curriculum, writing lesson plans, and assessing learning. They also enable us to bring every aspect of our program into alignment and to prevent gaps and overlap. They give us the means to provide a seamless K-12 music program in which the skills introduced at every level are reinforced and expanded systematically at the next higher level.

But some of us may not be taking full advantage of the potential benefits of having written standards. For example, standards make it possible to report student progress to parents in a more meaningful manner than appears to be typical today. Parents want to know how their kids are doing in school. Often they're not satisfied with traditional letter grades, which may be inflated and usually provide no useful context or frame of reference. Neither are they likely to be content with lengthy paragraphs of meaningless educational jargon. The best way to report student progress to parents is to indicate the extent to which the student has achieved each item on a short list of standards-based objectives. Valid assessment must be based on evidence, and the evidence should be rooted in written standards. Students too need to understand fully what is expected of them. If they don't learn what we want them to learn, one reason may be that they don't know precisely what that is.

Another benefit of written standards perhaps not always exploited to the fullest is that they furnish a basis for claiming needed resources. Once a district has adopted standards it must then provide the resources necessary to achieve those standards. This means that it must make available the required teaching staff as well as the essential time, materials, equipment, and facilities.

One exceptionally useful feature of standards not always fully appreciated is that standards provide a basis for insisting on qualified teachers. With standards we can bypass the argument about whether music should be taught by classroom teachers or by music specialists. If the music curriculum is expressed in terms of activities rather than outcomes, it can probably be taught by teachers without a high level of musical skills. But if it's expressed in terms of outcomes rather than activities, then it must be taught by teachers who themselves possess the skills and

knowledge sought. If a district relies on classroom teachers to prepare students to meet its music standards, then it must ensure that the classroom teachers it hires possess those skills and that knowledge themselves. At present it is far from clear that this expectation is enforced uniformly. In any case, with standards the labels of classroom teacher and music specialist become largely irrelevant in practice. All that matters is the teacher's ability to help students gain the skills and knowledge called for in the standards.

A special virtue of written standards in music is that they help to ensure that school music is not confused with entertainment. Standards give us credibility in claiming that the music program, like programs in the other core disciplines, is based on learning important, well-defined skills and knowledge. Standards strengthen our argument that music is not something to be engaged in merely as a respite from the serious business of education; music is itself an essential component of education. It is not a frill. The fundamental and pervasive role that music plays in the entertainment business and in popular culture sometimes blinds people to the very different but crucial role that it plays in education. After a choir parents' open house, one mother was heard saying to another "I didn't know the kids actually learned things in choir. I thought they just sang." With well-crafted standards that misperception won't occur.

Ultimately, of course, the main usefulness of standards lies in the fact that they provide a vision for the future. It should be obvious to everyone that schools can be more effective if they have a clear vision of what they seek to achieve than if they don't.

Building Support

In order to reach our goals for music education in 2050 we must work continuously to ensure that our programs are understood and supported by school administrators, by parents, and by the general public. In this endeavor we should be certain to involve the newspaper columnists, TV personalities, and celebrities who shape public opinion. Our tactics should include not only offering information through print and electronic media, including social media, but also conducting personal, live exhibitions, including open rehearsals, demonstration classes, and explanatory sessions designed to acquaint target audiences with our objectives, our teaching methods, and our instructional materials.

The most useful tool in helping our communities to understand our programs, not surprisingly, is our standards. Our standards play an indispensable role in explaining our programs to the public. They make clear what it is that we do. They tell the world our goals for our students. Without the widespread awareness

they facilitate we cannot expect to be taken seriously by the key players in society whose support is vital to our work.

Our standards should be reviewed and revised periodically, and every stakeholder should be involved in the review process. This includes school administrators, parents, and students, as well as the general public. Broad participation will likely result in better standards and will certainly result in stronger, more solid support for music in our schools.

Finally, it's crucial that we build coalitions of individuals and organizations in support of our programs. These coalitions are essential in times of budget cuts or other threats. We have many friends and potential allies in every community who are sympathetic to our efforts, but it's necessary to organize these likely partners into effective, working alliances before a crisis erupts because when an emergency occurs it may be too late.

Coda

Music is one of the most powerful, most compelling, and most glorious manifestations of every culture, and every person ought to be able to understand, enjoy, and participate fully in his or her musical heritage. Nothing does more than music to enhance an individual's quality of life. In my view, the quality-of-life rationale for music education typically receives far too little emphasis and should be stressed much more heavily as we look toward 2050. Nothing contributes more than music to bringing joy, beauty, and satisfaction into peoples' lives, and nothing taught in the schools contributes more immediately or more directly than music to the factors that affect the quality of life. Young people can use their musical skills and knowledge to improve the quality of their lives for as long as they live, regardless of their occupations and regardless of their economic or social status.

The arts belong among the basics in the school curriculum. That's the view of virtually everyone who has thought seriously about education since Plato. Our youth are not mere pawns on the gigantic chessboard of international economic competition. Preparing young people to live rich, satisfying, and rewarding lives should take precedence over preparing them narrowly for the world of work. By offering high-quality, standards-based programs that are comprehensive, balanced, sequential, and available to every student, we can help bring to reality the principles set forth in the *Housewright Declaration*. In so doing we will take a giant step toward ensuring that music in our schools not only survives but flourishes, and that music remains a vital feature of American life.

Endnotes

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- ⁴Chris Mai and Ram Subramanian, *The Price of Prisons: Examining State Spending Trends, 2010-2015* (May 2017), 8, <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/the-price-of-prisons-2015-state-spending-trends.pdf>
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- ⁹June Hinckley, “Introduction,” in *Vision 2020: The Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education*, ed. Cliff Madsen (Reston, VA: MENC, 2000), 1-3.
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