

# *Gilbert Music Matters*

Gilbert Advocates for Music Education

## **Seeking a Balanced Approach To Elementary Music Scheduling**

*Preserving the Strength of Music Education in Gilbert by  
Preserving the Elementary Instrumental Programs*



***Gilbert at a Crossroads:  
A Race to Excellence?  
A Race to Average?  
Or, a Race to the Bottom?***

“**Gilbert Music Matters**”, also know as Gilbert Advocates for Music Education, represents the voice of hundreds of parents and students throughout the Gilbert School District. Our goal is to advocate for the continued support of music in our district and work collaboratively with the Governing Board and Administration in balancing that advocacy with the rest of the needs of the district.

***[www.GilbertMusicMatters.com](http://www.GilbertMusicMatters.com)***

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## ***Introduction: Questions For Consideration***

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For some time, the Gilbert Elementary Schools have noted significant challenges with the existing six-day block schedule such as increasing curriculum mandates, excessive and inefficient study hall, the need for clarity and consistency, and so forth. To address these challenges, the district Administration has experimented with a five-day block schedule pilot program in a small number of schools. The governing board is now considering transitioning the entire district to the new five-day program. A critical and unfortunate impact of the program that was introduced to the board on January 26, 2010 is that instructional time for elementary **band and strings would be reduced by as much as 38%, putting Gilbert below most districts in the region.** This document seeks to address the following questions and concerns regarding the new program:

- Historically, what level of commitment has Gilbert had toward music education? Does this new program represent a landmark reduction and philosophical change to that commitment? If so, does that truly represent the desires of parents and students in the district?
- Do we have, as some believe, an excessive, unbalanced, or inappropriately high emphasis on music education in Gilbert?
- Why is music the only subject to be dramatically reduced in the proposed new schedule? Is that a reflection of how music will be treated if/when we face difficult budget challenges in the future?
- What is the impact of this change not just to the elementary music programs, but Junior High and High School music programs?
- How do our music programs compare to other districts both in terms of instructional time and achievement?
- What are the stated goals of the new five-day program?
  - How can we support the district in achieving those goals?
  - How effectively does the new program achieve those goals?
  - Can those goals be achieved with a six-day block?
  - If not with a six-day block, can those goals be achieved with an alternate five-day block that does not negatively impact the band and strings program?
- In the existing schedule, what are the educational and practical reasons that band and strings are allotted more time? Does this difference represent an over-emphasis on the music programs or is it appropriate based on objective factors such as the relatively high number of students in a music class, the complexity of music skills instruction, and established standards.
- What benefits does music education provide in terms of academic performance, test scores, multi-disciplinary skills development, and other non-musical results? Why should music education matter to the overall educational experience in Gilbert?
- Ultimately, what is the primary purpose of instrumental music education in the elementary schools? Is there a balanced way to achieve the scheduling needs of the district while not undermining that primary purpose?

## *Position Statement*

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**We support the Gilbert Unified School District's desire to find a way to solve scheduling challenges, but not at the expense of dramatic or disproportionate cuts to the music programs.** We believe that a **solution exists** to meet the needs of the teachers and students while preserving the level of quality music instruction time.

We do not advocate that music is more important than math, reading, science, PE, art, library, or any other subject. We seek a balanced and full educational experience for our students. We recognize the ongoing needs and challenges facing teachers of other subjects and support their efforts to achieve an optimal teaching environment. However, we also view music as being core and central to the educational experience and seek to prevent music from being minimized or treated as a peripheral part of the curriculum. We believe the current allocation of instructional time is balanced and appropriate and that a reduction would represent a minimization or marginalization of music.

Elementary School is the unique time in a student's life where they can have more than just superficial exposure to music. Regardless of whether they continue with music past elementary school, this is a time where the many life-benefits of music are instilled, an experience that should not be undermined. For those that do continue, elementary school serves as the foundation for later programs. **Junior and Senior High School music programs cannot be strong without a strong elementary program.** We have sadly observed in neighboring districts such as Mesa and Paradise Valley, reductions to the elementary music programs unquestionably cause negative impacts to the Junior High and High School programs.

Furthermore, the elementary band and strings program play an important role in the academic success of students in terms of measurably better test scores and academic achievement as documented in numerous national studies. **Music is not merely peripheral to education of young people, it is core.** Cutting the elementary instrumental music program by as much as 38% would be a disservice to student's educational experience and a detriment to the entire Gilbert music program all the way through High School.

We see this decision as being about much more than just elementary school scheduling. **We see this as Gilbert at the crossroads, facing a landmark and far reaching philosophical decision regarding its core commitment to the role of music in education.**

It has been suggested that Gilbert's elementary band and strings programs have proportionally much more emphasis than other special subjects and neighboring district programs. Therefore, the suggestion is that the proposed reductions do not represent cuts. Rather, they represent a "scaling back into proportion". **We fundamentally and strongly disagree with this perspective.** First of all, the high student/teacher ratio and complexity of skills in an elementary music program merits the amount of instructional time the Gilbert District has supported for the past three decades. Second, according to our research, in comparison to neighboring districts, we do not allot a disproportionately higher amount of time to elementary music instruction. The proposed change would reduce the Gilbert programs to levels well below many neighboring districts. Gilbert's tradition of excellence does not include using less than excellent performance by others to justify a reduction in our own goals, vision, and standards. **We are not in a race to average!** Why reduce to average when there is no truly compelling reason to do so? **In fact, a 38% cut would put us well below average!**

We have extensively evaluated schools and programs across our district as well as other districts and programs in our region. **We have seen the high price other districts have paid for scaling back and**

**the difficulty required to rebuild.** The Gilbert District is widely recognized as a leading music program in Arizona. This was not always the case. This is an achievement that has required many decades of commitment to excellence and hard work. The proposed 38% reduction to the elementary program will negatively impact all of that. Unless the most extreme circumstances are demanding a retreat from this high level of accomplishment, we are not willing to witness the undoing of decades of progress.

We appeal to the Governing Board, Administration, parents and students in Gilbert to consider the following:

- 1. Preserve the philosophical level of commitment to music education in Gilbert we have worked to build over several decades. Do not be satisfied with the notion that we have achieved too much and should scale back to below average.**
- 2. If you do believe that music education is over-emphasized in Gilbert and needs reduction, please say so openly and independently from your views on scheduling. If this is merely a scheduling issue and reduction to music is not a desired outcome, we can solve it as a scheduling issue. However, if this is an issue of curricular priority and balance, then it is much more than a scheduling issue and needs to be solved openly as such.**
- 3. The scheduling goals sought by the district matter and should be achieved. Let us all take whatever time is necessary to find the scheduling solution that achieves those goals without disproportionately impacting band and strings.**

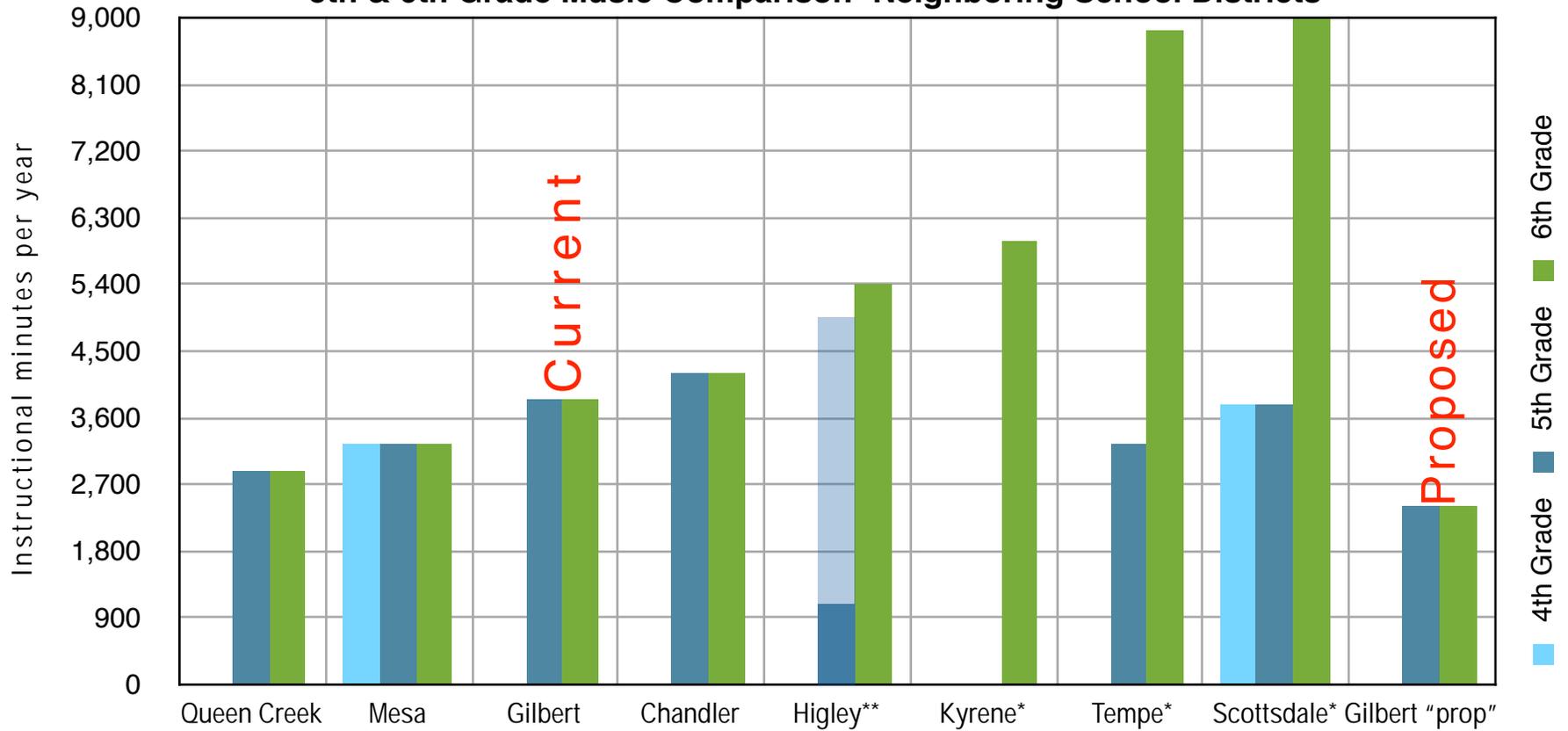
## *Neighboring District Comparisons*

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It would appear that a primary justification for reducing music in Gilbert is that because we allocate so much more time to elementary band and strings than neighboring districts, reductions would not be cuts, but adjustments to par. First of all why reduce to par (i.e. middle or average) if you don't have to. In Gilbert, we seek to excel, not to be merely average. Second, the analysis of neighboring districts below clearly demonstrates that in terms of actual instructional time, the current allotment is not disproportionately above par. Alarming, the proposed 38% reduction would reduce Gilbert to a level below par. **Not only are we contemplating a race to average, we are contemplating a race to the bottom!**

**See Comparison Chart on Next Page**

## 5th & 6th Grade Music Comparison- Neighboring School Districts



School District	Start Grade	Class Type	Specials on 1/2 days?	Frequency	x Class Length =	Instructional minutes/year
Queen Creek	5th	full	yes	2/5 school days	30 minutes	2880: 5th and 6th
Mesa	4th Orch, 5th Band	classroom pull-out	yes	3/5 school days	30 minutes	3240: 5th and 6th
<b>Gilbert (Current)</b>	5th	homogenous & full	no	4/6 school days	35 minutes	3850: 5th and 6th
Chandler	5th	homogenous & full	yes	4/6 school days	35 minutes	4200: 5th and 6th
Higley	6th	homogenous & full	yes	3/5 school days	50 minutes	1080-4860: 5th** 5976: 6th
Kyrene	6th	full	yes	5/10 days	68 minutes	1080: 5th 5976: 6th
Scottsdale	4th (Band & Orch)	homogenous & full	yes	3/5 days 5th grade 5/5 days 6th Grade	35 minutes 50 minutes	3780: 5th 9000: 6th
Tempe	5th	full	yes	3/5 days 5th grade 5/5 days 6th grade	30 minutes 49 minutes	3240: 5th 8820: 6th
<b>Gilbert (Proposed)</b>	5th	by classroom	no	2/5 days (Wed, Fri)	40 minutes	2400: 5th and 6th

## **Letter from Larry Mabbitt regarding mistakes in the Mesa District**

The question is, “What do we gain by cutting back on the instructional time allocated to music in our elementary program?”

The answer, “Nothing.” Looking at Mesa as a model is the worst idea you could possibly have.

In 1979 when I came to Mesa as Director of Music Education, Mesa’s music program enjoyed nationwide reputation for excellence. Our students dominated the high school All-State band, orchestra, and chorus. People from every corner of the country hoped they might have a chance to come to the Mesa schools to teach so I had the absolute “pick of the litter.”

At my request, Mesa’s research and development division did a study of our 6th grade music students to see how they fared on the district’s standardized tests. Believe it or not, the results showed that the music students scored a minimum of one full grade level above their peers. Some were higher.

None the less, Mesa went on to redesign the program which has led to the following outcomes:

1. Fewer students are participating in the elementary program.
2. As a result of #1, fewer students are participating in the junior high program.
3. As a result of #1 and #2, fewer students are participating in the high school program.
4. Mesa no longer dominates the All-State festival.
5. Top notch teachers no longer seek employment in Mesa as their first choice.

The term “a well rounded education” has lost its meaning in Mesa. Students who have musical talents are being squeezed out of participation, even though it was shown that they could excel academically and musically. This is, in my opinion, a huge tragedy.

Music study fosters skills that serve students for a lifetime. They learn to set goals, they learn to concentrate, and they learn to practice repetition until mastery of a skill is attained. In addition, there are myriad social skills that come into play, like team work, accepting differences in each other, appreciation of music from various cultures. What responsible parent or educator would willingly give all that up?

I implore you to look long and deep into the research which shows how music boosts academic success and rather than cut back, invest in the long range benefits of the study of music.

Larry Mabbitt  
Director of Music, Retired  
Mesa Public Schools

Following is a graphical analysis of elementary band and strings programs in neighboring districts:

## ***Results and Success of Gilbert Music***

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Numbers and hours are only part of the success story for music education in Gilbert. **While the elementary schedule we've been using for the past thirty years is roughly comparable to neighboring districts, the results are far beyond comparable.**

There is much more to Gilbert's district wide success in music than our elementary schedule. But, **the success of the elementary programs is the foundation upon which we have built state-wide and nationally recognized programs in our Junior and Senior High School Programs.** Undermining the elementary programs would be a major step toward dismantling in the future the amazing kinds of achievements our students have accomplished in the past.

***This is just a partial, abbreviated list. A more detail summary is provided later on.***

- Leading Regional and Allstate Representation
- Arizona Music Educators Conference Performances
- Mesquite High School
  - “These 60 kids have gone through Gilbert schools. The elementary strings teachers start them out, then they go on to junior high. The kids get to do great things if they continue through the music programs here. If GPS didn't promote this fantastic music education program, there'd be no way we'd be going to Carnegie.” -Amber Dudley in GoGilbert Magazine, February 2010, Page 24-25
- Highland High School
  - Highland Marching Band
    - Fiesta Bowl, Rose Bowl and Macy Day's Parade
    - Fall 2006: The marching band was undefeated in AZ and won in CA.
    - Spring 2007: The Wind Ensemble received a Superior w distinction and Symphonic Band received a Superior at the ABODA Concert band Festival. The Jazz Band received a Superior at the Flagstaff Jazz festival (which is the highest score they could receive).
    - Fall 2007: The Marching Band ranked in the top 10 at a BOA regional held in Flagstaff.
    - Spring 2008: The Wind Ensemble received a Superior w distinction and Symphonic Band received a Superior at the ABODA Concert band Festival. The Jazz Band received a Superior at the Flagstaff Jazz festival (which is the highest score they could receive). Later in the spring, the Wind Ensemble received 1st place at a Heritage festival held in San Diego (Top Division) and the Symphonic Band received 3rd place at the same festival (Top Division).
    - Fall 2008: The Marching Band ranked within the top 3 in every competition it was in.
    - Spring 2009: The Wind Ensemble received a Superior w distinction and Symphonic Band received a Superior at the ABODA Concert band Festival. The Wind Ensemble received top marks at a SCSBOA spring festival. The Wind Ensemble also received a Superior w/ Distinction at the ABODA state festival.
    - Fall 2009: The Marching band went undefeated in Arizona and won the first State Marching Championship.

- Spring 2010: The Wind Ensemble Performed at AMEA convention.
  - Highland High Orchestra
    - Nationally recognized as a leading high school orchestra
    - Midwest and other festival achievements
    - Carnegie Hall
  - Highland Jazz Program
    - March 26-27, 2010, Highland will host one of the largest education based jazz festivals ever seen in Arizona this March 26th and 27th. The festival is attracting National attention.
  - Highland Choir
    - Extensive awards
    - Carnegie Hall
- Gilbert High School Band Program
  - Inaugural Parade for President Bush in the year 2001, Washington DC. This is one of the most elite honors a band can receive in the country.
  - Competed at Bands of America grand nationals 2001
  - Bands of America (BOA) regional finalists 4 times
  - 2007 Second Place at the BOA regional at NAU. That year Gilbert Band was #1 of all Arizona bands competing.
  - Two time Hatler Cup recipient
  - 2009 third place to Highland by 6 tenths of a point.
  - 2006 Marched in the Saint Patrick's Day Parade in Dublin Ireland
  - Multiple appearances at Rose parade and Fiesta Bowl
  - Parade of Roses in Oregon in 1996
  - The wind ensemble has received multiple superior with distinction ratings, the highest rating possible in state competition.
  - The drumline achieved world status in 2004. Drumline won the SPR award 3 times was a pioneer in the activity.
  - Leading winterguard team in the state. Currently the only high school in AZ to achieve the open class level.
  - Marching Band played on stage with the band 'tool' in front of twenty thousand people.
  - Leading jazz band program.
- Highland Junior High 8th Grade Orchestra
  - Superior rating - ABODA Fall Orchestra Festival (11 out of 12 years, since the school opened)
  - Superior Rating - Grand Canyon Junior High Orchestra Festival at NAU (11 out of 12 years, since the school opened)
  - Performed at the AMEA Honor Concert during State Conference - 2000, 2003, 2007
- South Valley Junior High
  - ABODA festivals for 05-09 receiving 3 superiors and 2 excellent
  - Grand Canyon Jr. High Festivals from 05-09 with 4 superiors and 1 excellent.
  - South Valley Orchestra, has 4 students who have boundary exemptions- 3 from Queen Creek and 1 from San Tan
  - 2-Superior with Distinction 2006, 2009
  - 2 Excellent, 2007, 2008
  - Premiered a new Composition for 8th Grade Concert Band 2008 ( Caprice by Julian Peterson)
  - Able to "rally the community" for the "Concert in the Park" Tax credit fundraiser.

- Accompaniment for Drama Skit that was Character Counts related (Jazz Band), Live performance
- Towne Meadows 6th Grade Band
  - Performed at the AMEA Honor Concert at In-Service Conference in January 2007
- Settler's Point Elementary
  - 2006 Gilbert Education Foundation grant for Dr. Max Plank of Eastern Michigan University to come and conduct a clinic for 6th Grade Band and other band/strings teachers.

This is merely a partial list of achievements across the district and across years of tradition. All of this is built on the foundation of commitment to a strong elementary program.

Mr. Jason Martin is the principal at Highland Park elementary, one of the schools that participated in the pilot program. We commend him and his colleagues for the extensive effort they have invested toward working out the many complicated scheduling factors. This has been a huge task and we support the continued effort to achieve the goals of the pilot program. However, he also stated that **"if the Gilbert Unified School District expands the alternative schedule to all elementary schools, the band program will not be the "premiere" program it is now. I think it will be a good intro program to band and strings. And I think you as a board have to decide philosophically what is it you want to weigh."** How can we so easily consider walking away from so much accomplishment? Are we okay just introducing this core subject or do we want to seriously dig and teach? Gilbert has some of the finest music educators in the profession teaching in our elementary schools. Should we limit what these teachers can do for our students? How can we feel okay about calling average acceptable when there is no extreme or compelling reason to do scale back? Quite simply, we must work harder to preserve our rich tradition of premiere excellence.

## ***Justification for Current Music Time Allotment***

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Music is the most multi-disciplinary subject. Why does music education enable students to achieve higher test scores and academic achievement? Skills such as math, science, and reading do not become fully engrained into a student's "whole person" until they are able to be applied and made relevant to other subjects and contexts. Addition doesn't become interesting or relevant until a student is required to apply it outside the world of math. Music simultaneously and aggressively exercises all facets of thinking and all disciplines of learning:

- **Left Brain Skills:** math, division, time, proportion, following instructions, physics, analysis, etc.
- **Right Brain Skills:** expression, creativity, spatial thinking, abstract thinking, metaphor, social organization and roles, leadership, team building, team achievement, patience, behavior, etc.

Benjamin Bloom and a group of leading educational psychologists underscore the need for learning in multiple **Learning Domains**:

- **Cognitive:** mental skills (Knowledge)
  - Knowledge and the development of intellectual skills.
- **Affective:** growth in feelings or emotional areas (Attitude)
  - Includes the manner in which we deal with things emotionally, such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes
- **Psychomotor:** manual or physical skills (Skills)
  - Includes physical movement, coordination, and use of the motor-skill areas.

Of all subject areas, music instruction is the one that most comprehensively enables students learn in all three domains and cross pollinate thought, ideas, creativity, problem solving, and other skills in parallel across all three. **This makes music a critical and unique tool for purely academic and developmental goals. It also demonstrates the level of complexity involved with music instruction and the justification for ensuring adequate instructional time.**

Howard Gardner speaks of this "multi-disciplinary" idea in terms of people having "multiple intelligences". Figuring out how to "synthesize" or make all of these "intelligences" or "domains of thinking" interact with each other is the key to higher learning and accomplishment:

*"I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious. I want them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place. Knowledge is not the same as morality, but we need to understand if we are to avoid past mistakes and move in productive directions. An important part of that understanding is knowing who we are and what we can do... Ultimately, we must synthesize our understandings for ourselves. The performance of understanding that try matters are the ones we carry out as human beings in an imperfect world which we can affect for good or for ill. (Howard Gardner 1999: 180-181)"*

Why does music require the amount of instructional time that it does? Teaching students to apply that many skills in parallel is challenging and time consuming. It takes extensive modeling and repetition. Furthermore, as students refine the ability to think and function in so many dimensions, their ability to perform, adapt, relate, and apply in other subject areas increases. Some would say that music students perform well academically because only “smart” students pursue music. That would seem unfairly derogatory toward “non-music” students and elitist. Surely the truth is the inverse: **Music makes students smarter!**

To be effectively taught, music needs as much instructional time and repetition as possible. The skills needed for playing an instrument not only involve motor skills, they involve breathing techniques and math skills. Band and strings students are learning how to pick up their instrument, put it together, hold it, and play it. They are learning the concepts of how to read music. They are learning music theory, rhythm, dynamics, and gaining confidence to play their instrument in front of other people. They are learning a complex new language of musical terms and instructions. The thought process of learning to read music incorporates math and reading skills. Music not only requires more instructional time, it applies the concepts to learning in the classroom environment.

- Playing an instrument is a complicated skill
- It requires extensive individualized instruction, frequent instruction, and skill repetition.
- It requires muscle memory from increased and frequent instruction time
- It challenges students to simultaneously use both the right and left side of the brain
- Is a core curriculum under No Child Left Behind
- It requires an equal time commitment out of the classroom
- It fosters team building
- It shapes brain development
- Its one of the few areas that ELL children can participate despite the language barrier.
- It has numerous therapeutic benefits to special education students, especially those with autism.
- It is an active learning environment, one in which students with ADHD can excel.
- The exposure to music and its appreciation is something a child will carry with him the rest of his life

## **Music Serve a Broader Role**

We don't teach music only to train the next Bach, Beethoven, or Stravinsky. We teach music to nurture more compassionate, collaborative, creative, and inspiring future leaders, builders, inventors, engineers, lawyers, judges, law makers, teachers (of course) and all the rest of the fabric that makes a strong and enduring society. To reduce the quality of the musical education in the Gilbert School District does great detriment not only to the overall quality of education we deliver, but to the quality of life for the coming generations. The greatness of nations and communities is built in part on the greatness and dignity of its art, music, culture, and general creative spirit. In a world where arts and culture is not just declining, but becoming more negative and degrading, school music programs are the only access many young people have to the art forms that can and should elevate and inspire them, and enable them to perpetuate the greatness older generations have been blessed to know. To me, that is a stewardship for which we should all be accountable. **We in Gilbert must now decide how we shall account for that stewardship.** We say: Preserve what is great among us! We cannot do that unless we allocate the amount of time necessary.

“The challenge to American education has never been simply to raise test scores — that is a relatively recent and limited goal. The challenge has always been to raise citizens who are capable of active participation in the social, cultural, political and economic life of the world's longest experiment in democracy, an experiment demanding a free, educated and committed citizenry. We are amazed to discover anew the role of the arts in realizing that vision and creating that democracy.”

*Source: Lauren M. Stevenson and Richard J. Deasy,  
Third Space: When Learning Matters, Arts Education Partnership, 2005*