

Perceptions of Participation in Kids Orchestra of Baton Rouge: A survey of children,
Parents/Guardians, Classroom Teachers, and Teaching Artists
with grade score analysis of participants
2018 - 2019 School year

Melissa Brunkan, PhD

University of Oregon

Abstract

Previous research has shown that students who participate in musical training may experience academic, cognitive, social, and behavioral benefits. Evidence gathered through surveys, focus groups, and observations of Kids' Orchestra 21st Century Community Learning Center program indicate positive benefits for students. First, students participating in Kids' Orchestra 21st Century Community Learning Center demonstrated improvement in the areas of reading and mathematics as measured by a state identified assessment (data are forthcoming). Grade and test scores for student participants were gathered for subsequent analysis. First quarter and other quarter grades of participants for the 2018-19 school year will be compared for purposes on this report.

In regards to student attendance and attitude toward school, students participating in the program have higher attendance rate and a change in attitude toward school as measured by student program surveys as well as other positive perceived benefits. Over 68% of children stated that they had good attendance and liked school. Children (ages 6 – 11 years of age, $n = 156$) completed a program survey. Overall, 77% of children said participating in the program made them feel happy. Child participants most often stated that their reason for being a part of the program was to learn an instrument and that being a part of the program made them feel they were “good at something.” The majority of students agreed that participating in the program makes them feel like a musician, they understand music better, they are part of a team, they are more confident, they have more friends, they have the ability to face challenges and succeed, they feel nicer to people, and they are more understanding of other people.

Parents also completed a program survey and focus groups on perceived. Benefits and changes. Parent responses as to changes noticed in their children since participating in Kids'

Orchestra included ($n = 104$) school attendance ($n = 87, 84\%$), math ($n = 88, 85\%$), reading ($n = 94, 90\%$), behavior ($n = 94, 90\%$), peer interactions ($n = 97, 93\%$), self-confidence ($n = 101, 97\%$), and attitude toward school ($n = 97, 93\%$).

Factors perceived by teachers and staff as showing greatest positive change during students' participation in the program included confidence, social interaction, musical knowledge, musical skills and attitude.

Desired changes were also surveyed. Children offered ideas for changes in regards to instruments, teacher and snacks. However, 70% of students desired no changes in the program. Overall, parents stated four main categories of drawbacks or desired changes. The most frequent comment was "none" or "nothing" (77%). The second most frequent comment category had to do with parent schedule conflicts (8%). These comments included statements about traffic, difficulty with parking, difficulty attending weekend rehearsals, or difficulty leaving work in time to pick up their child. Some respondents stated that it was difficult to complete their child's homework at home after this program (7%) or that they wished for a change in the program schedule (8%).

Context

Research into perceived benefits, on a large scale, of children and parents associated with the Kids Orchestra of Baton Rouge after-school music program has not been extensively explored. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate children's and parent's perceived benefits of participation in an after-school music program. With that in mind, the following research questions guided this project:

- (1) What do comparison of Kids' Orchestra participants and non-Kid's Orchestra participants' grade scores indicate about possible impact of the program on academic grades?
- (2) What do students and parents give as reasons for and feelings about participation in the program?
- (3) According to students and parents, what are benefits of participation?
- (4) What about the program would students and parents like to be different?

Findings of the surveys are presented below by surveyed group (parents, teachers, and children). Findings of the grade score analysis are presented by grade and subject. The first set of findings will analyze and explore grade scores of students who participated in Kids' Orchestra during the 2018-19 school year. Then, perceptions of students in the Foundations program (kindergarten and 1st grade students), survey questionnaires completed by 2nd through 5th grade students, and finally, findings of survey questionnaires completed by parents, classroom teachers and teaching artists will be given. The concluding statements and discussion will address all of these populations.

Preliminary Grade Score Analysis 2018-19

Student grades for the school year 2018-19 were provided by East Baton Rouge district administration to Kids' Orchestra. In the EBR district many grades are scored on a 4-point scale (conduct, language/spelling, math, reading, science, social studies, and work habits) whereas some are scored on a 3-point scale (art, music, PE).

Report card grades of students in grades K - 5 in conduct, language/spelling, math, physical education, reading, science, social studies, work habits, music, and art were recorded and coded for subsequent analysis. Grades were calculated using the given point scales (i.e. 4.00 = A, 3.00 = B) and comparison done after within common scale calculations were performed.

These mean grade scores were compared for those students who participated in Kids' Orchestra and students who did not participate in the program. Grade comparisons were calculated by grade, within participant/non-participant groups, across and between categories/subjects, and by percentage. Preliminary analysis of grades is shown below by year (2018-19).

Preliminary Grade Analysis (2018-19)

The first comparison examined overall grades for students in the program compared to students not participating. Grades considered in this comparison were the following: conduct, language/spelling, math, physical education, reading, science, social studies, work habits, music work habits, and art. Grades for art, music and physical education were on a 100-point scale.

Table 1. Mean grade score comparison for students who participated in Kids' Orchestra with students who did not participate in the program. (indicates significant difference)*

2015-16 Grades	1st 6wks	2nd 6wks	4th 6wks	5th 6wks	Mean Scores
KO	91.26	90.38	89.96	91.07	90.67
non-KO	87.68	86.97	86.22	87.91	87.19
Diff KO/non-KO	*3.58	*3.41	*3.74	*3.16	*3.48
%Diff	3.6%	3.4%	3.7%	3.2%	3.5%

As can be seen in the table above, grades of students who participated in Kids' Orchestra during the 2018-19 school year were above the district average every quarter. Participants in Kids' Orchestra scored over 3% higher than the district average in their respective grade. These mean grade scores can be seen in the figure below as well. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare mean scores of Kids' Orchestra and non-Kids' Orchestra students. There was a significant difference ($t(3) = 34.31, p < .00001$) when comparing mean grades of KO and non-KO students overall. Further, significant differences were found for differences of the mean for quarter one ($t(3) = 3.646, p < .00001$), quarter 2 ($t(3) = 3.42, p < .00001$), quarter 3 ($t(3) = 3.756, p < .00001$), and quarter 4 ($t(3) = 3.246, p < .00001$).

Table 2. 2015-2016 Mean difference/change from one quarter to another

	Qtrs. 1-2	Qtrs. 1 - 3	Qtrs. 1 - 4	Qtrs. 2 - 3	Qtrs. 2 - 4	Qtrs. 3 - 4
KO	-0.88	-1.29	-0.18	-0.42	0.69	1.11
Non-KO	-.71	-1.45	0.23	0.74	0.94	1.69
Diff KO/Non-KO		-0.16	0.41	-1.16	-0.25	-0.58

Mean differences in grades by course were also examined. Mean grade scores of students participating in Kids' Orchestra and students who did not participate were compared by course or topic (Table 3). Students who participated in Kids' Orchestra scored at least ten percent higher than the district average in several categories/grades (conduct, language/spelling, math, reading, science, social studies, and work habits) during at least three of four quarters during the 2018-19 school year.

Participant Perceptions - Survey Data Results

Method and Results - Students

Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire instrument for this study was created through research into past surveys of similar organizations in the United States over the past five years. Research on potential benefits of musical training and participation was also evaluated. Data and instruments from these studies elucidated possible topics of interest and focus as well as possible benefits (musical, social, other) of this kind of after-school music program for elementary students in an urban area of the United States.

The survey questionnaire instrument was then drafted and piloted with a small group ($N=5$) of children in order to assess possible need for restructuring or alteration for clarity of language. Further, the researcher expected this instrument to be given to children prior instrument lessons or music class. The goal was to gather the children's ideas without disrupting their schedule too extensively. With this in mind, it was determined that the instrument should take no more than 5 – 7 minutes, on average, to complete. The pilot of the survey instrument proved to be very helpful in clarification of language, expected completion time, and question

ordering. Edits were made and paper copies were created for each program site. The survey contained demographic data questions, open ended question prompts (with a box for words or drawings), and icons to circle in answer to some questions about feelings (smiley and sad faces associated with an answer of happy or sad).

Upon arrival at one end of semester class, children were invited to complete the survey questionnaire. They were given a copy of the two-sided instrument as well as a pencil with which to write as they checked in for the concert at a table set up for check in purposes. Completed surveys were collected in a submission box and kept by the site coordinator who later transferred original survey questionnaires to the researcher.

Demographic Data - Foundations

Children ($N = 151$) participating in Foundations ($n = 34$) (general music for kindergarten and first grade students) for at least one semester and the main program ($n = 117$) completed the survey questionnaire. These data represent perceptions of children in the program from different area elementary schools as well as homeschooled children. Other children ($N = 117$) participating in the after-school music program for at least one semester completed the survey questionnaire. These data represent perceptions of children in the program from 16 different area elementary schools as well as homeschooled students.

These data represent children between the ages of 5 - 11 years of age in grades K - 1 ($n = 34$, 22%), 2 - 5 (2nd grade ($n = 37$, 24%), 3rd grade ($n = 32$, 21%), 4th grade ($n = 33$, 22%), and 5th grade ($n = 15$, 10%). Students played an instrument or were a part of choir.

Prompt. “Being a part of Kids Orchestra helps me know/feel...”

Finally, students were asked to check items on a list from phrases such as “I am doing better in math,” or “I am more confident” that completed the phrase “being a part of Kids Orchestra helps me know/feel...” Student response numbers are show below (Table 9).

Table 9. Number of participants who checked each statement in response to “being a part of Kids Orchestra helps me know/feel...”

Statement	<i>Grades K-1</i>	<i>Grades 2 - 5</i>	Overall
I am confident	83.33	73.11	78.221
I am a part of a team	97.22	78.15	87.68
Like I am a musician	97.22	85.71	91.47
I understand music better	97.22	57.14	77.18
I have more friends	97.22	90.76	93.98
I am nicer	91.67	58.82	75.24
I like different kinds of music	97.22	84.87	91.04
I can face challenges and succeed	91.67	73.97	82.81
I am good at something	86.11	67.23	76.77
I am doing better in math	94.44	79.84	97.13
I am doing better in writing	97.22	59.66	78.44
I have good attendance	91.67	54.62	73.14

Overall, a majority of students marked each item/statement. The highest number of children marking the statements came with the answers to “I have more friends” (93.98%) and “I’m doing better at math” (97.13%).

Method and Results - Parent Participants

Survey Questionnaire Instrument

The survey questionnaire instrument for this study was created through research into past surveys of similar organizations in the United States over the past five years. Research on potential benefits of musical training and participation was also evaluated. Data and instruments from these studies elucidated possible topics of interest and focus as well as possible researched benefits (musical, social, other) of this kind of after-school music program for elementary students in an urban area of the United States.

The survey questionnaire instrument was then drafted and piloted with a small group ($N=5$) of adults in order to assess possible need for restructuring or alteration for clarity of language. Further, the researcher expected this instrument to be given to parents and guardians prior to a student performance. With this in mind, it was determined that the instrument should take no more than 5 – 7 minutes, on average, to complete. The pilot of the survey instrument proved to be very helpful in clarification of language, expected completion time, and question ordering. Edits were made and paper copies were made for each concert site. The survey contained demographic data questions, open ended question prompts, and a word checklist. The survey questionnaire was aimed at collecting data on parent/guardian perceived benefits of participation.

Upon arrival at the end of semester performance, parents/guardians were invited to complete the survey questionnaire. They were given a copy of the two-sided instrument as well as a pencil with which to write as they checked in for the concert at a table set up for check in purposes. Completed surveys were collected in a submission box available to parents/guardians at a table outside of the performance venue.

Demographic Data

Parents or guardians ($N = 102$) of children participating in the program for at least one semester completed the survey questionnaire. These data represent perceptions of parents or guardians of children in the program from 16 different area elementary schools as well as homeschooled students.

Prompt. “Since starting to participate in Kids Orchestra, I notice my child...”

The survey asked parents to mark certain areas (or supply others) that they think have been positively affected in their child who participates in Kids Orchestra (see Table below).

Table . Number of participants who checked each statement in response to “check items that have improved since your child has been a part of the program”

Statement	<i>n</i>	%
Confidence	101	97%
Focus	94	90%
Peer Interaction	97	93%
Reading	94	90%
Math	88	85%
Attendance	87	84%
Behavior	94	90%
Attitude	97	93%

The most frequently marked factors were confidence ($n = 101, 97\%$) and peer interaction ($n = 97, 93\%$). Attitude was the second most frequently chosen factor ($n = 97, 93\%$). Reading improvement was marked by 94 parents (90%) and focus was marked by 94 students (90%).

Conclusion/Discussion

Overall, the data collected through the use of child and parent/guardian survey questionnaires indicated many perceived benefits of participation. Like previous research showing that students who participate in musical training may experience academic, cognitive, social, and behavioral benefits, this study indicated many perceived benefits of participation.

The questionnaire used in this investigation gathered demographic data as well as asking children and parents/guardians about their perception of the program, teachers, and overall experience. Overall, therefore, most of the children said participating in the program made them feel happy. Many of the children in this program live in low SES households, attend schools with poor infrastructure, and face many difficulties such as not having enough food or appropriate clothing. It could be concluded, therefore, that this program is an important part of their lives, helping them to feel happy each week.

The majority of student participants said participating in Kids' Orchestra helped them feel they are good at something, like they're a musician, they understand music better, they are part of a team, more confident, and can face challenges and succeed. Changes observed by parents since their child began participating in the program include: better behavior, academic improvement, increased focus, more confidence, sings/plays more, attends to music, and is happier. Top areas of change noticed by parents/guardians in students since participation included confidence, attendance, math, reading, behavior, focus, peer interaction, self-confidence, and attitude toward school.

This line of investigation will continue with efforts to gain further insight by examination of the impact of an after-school music experience (orchestra and choir) on elementary school children's perceptions. Academic success, attendance, musical skills and knowledge, and behavioral/social outcomes (empathy, leadership, resilience, teamwork, and understanding of differences) will continue to be explored through observation, interviews, school records, and musical assessments. Further, teachers (classroom, music and after-school music) and administrators will be surveyed and interviewed. These additional sources of information and perspectives may offer further insight into the experience of the children in the program.

Research indicates that children who live in persistent poverty have an even greater risk of suffering detrimental effects on academic achievement and socioemotional functioning than students who experience occasional poverty (Gottlieb, Adler, Gottlieb, & Wishner, 1994; McLoyd, 1998). According to the Children's Defense Fund (2009), nearly 18% of children in the U.S. are poor and almost 8% of children in the U.S. live in extreme poverty. Low SES, family poverty, and living in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood are factors that can contribute to lower academic achievement, and an increase in socio-emotional problems at school. Programs such as Kids Orchestra that target students in low SES families and schools may offer a positive experience for children to learn, gaining skills and knowledge that may be transferred to the school day – academic, social, and emotional.

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