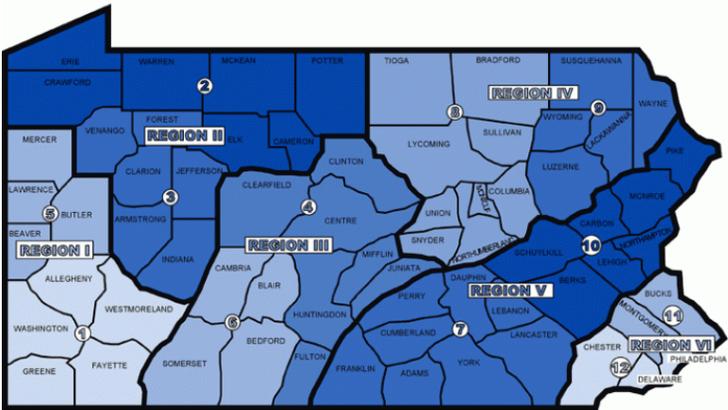


PENNSYLVANIA MUSIC EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION



2026 POLICY PLAYBOOK

The Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) is a statewide nonprofit organization of over 3,700 members dedicated to promoting the musical development of all Pennsylvanians. The present membership evolved from a small group of band directors dating from 1933. Today, the organization includes those engaged in music instruction at all levels, from preschool through college and university, as well as those in the music products industry. The association promotes and supports quality music education, learning and performance as well as promoting and supporting music education in schools and communities. PMEA is affiliated with The National Association for Music Education, NAFME.



The association is made up of twelve geographic districts and six geographic regions serving the needs of members and students in their area.

Vision

We envision a world of engaged musical citizens where a deep desire to learn, teach, connect through, and experience music is advanced.

Mission

The Pennsylvania Music Educators Association advances comprehensive and innovative music education through promoting effective instruction, providing meaningful learning experiences, and ensuring impactful and equitable music engagement for all.



Pennsylvania Music Educators Association Fundamental Beliefs

PMEA believes music and the arts effectively:

- Engage students in their creative, cultural, aesthetic, intellectual, social, physical and emotional development—indeed, in the development of their identities as students and citizens
- Develop students’ skills critical to 21st century learning for success in school and life
- Develop skills integral to the economy of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the United States
- Develop social and emotional learning skills
- Provide a place for students from all backgrounds, genders, and races to find community and belonging

All pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students in Pennsylvania must be guaranteed:

- Adequate and equitable funding for schools that allows for all students to receive a well-rounded education
- That music and arts education is offered as core curricula
- That the music and arts curricula being offered to them are based on a balanced, comprehensive, and sequential pre-K-12 standards-based music and arts education
- A music and arts education taught and assessed by certified music and arts educators

PMEA State Policy Priorities and Recommendations

In order for PMEA's fundamental beliefs to become reality for all Pennsylvania students, PMEA encourages the legislature, the Governor, the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the State Board of Education to be proactive in ensuring that all school districts and charter schools receive adequate and equitable funding, adequate policy support for the well-rounded education of every student (which includes music and the arts as defined by the Every Student Succeeds Act), and support for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

The following seven policy recommendations represent the current policy landscape and current issues as of February 2026, for which PMEA is advocating.

1. Increase in Basic Education Subsidy Funding

The **Pennsylvania General Assembly** should work with the **Governor** to increase the Basic Education Subsidy and adequacy payments through the Ready to Learn Block Grant program. Increasing these subsidies will allow school districts the discretion to use funds as they see fit to meet local needs and serve students more effectively. Over the past decade, the Governor and General Assembly have provided consistent and meaningful increases to the Basic Education Subsidy, and Governor Shapiro's 2026-27 proposal continues that trajectory with a Basic Education Funding (BEF) line of approximately **\$8.312 billion**, an increase of about **\$50 million** over 2025-26, alongside roughly **\$565 million** in new "adequacy" and related supplements targeted to underfunded districts. We urge Governor Shapiro and the General Assembly to recognize the impact of these investments and to continue providing meaningful increases to education funding, especially in light of the February 2023 Commonwealth Court decision that ruled Pennsylvania's school funding system unconstitutional and in need of reform. Any increase in funding must also reflect rising mandated costs that school districts face, including special education, charter tuition, transportation, and student mental health supports. Beyond the 2026-27 budget, the General Assembly must provide annual state funding to school districts in an amount, and distributed through a formula, that supports the principles of **equity, adequacy, accountability, and predictability**.

Context:

PMEA continues to ask for an increase to the Basic Education Subsidy year after year, as do most education groups visiting Harrisburg. At one point, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania provided more than 50% of K-12 funding; that share has dropped significantly over time, and school districts have been forced to make up the difference with local tax dollars, creating substantial inequities among communities. The state's share of total district spending is roughly 38%, which places an outsized burden on local taxpayers and contributes to Pennsylvania's ranking among the highest states in the nation for local spending on education. When the state does not pay its fair share, pressure is placed on schools and communities to raise property taxes to fill the gap, and the wide variation in local tax bases across Pennsylvania drives large funding disparities; districts with wealthier tax bases spend, on average, thousands of dollars more per student than districts without a healthy local tax base. Even with a funding formula that accounts for factors such as local wealth, poverty, and enrollment, inequity persists; increasing state dollars for schools, distributed through the Fair Funding Formula and the new adequacy mechanisms, is a critical step toward removing funding barriers at the local level.



Governor Shapiro has proposed a continued, multi-year investment in K-12 education based on the work of the Basic Education Funding Commission, using adequacy payments distributed through Ready to Learn Block Grants to drive new dollars to the most underfunded districts. His proposal embraces key principles—targeted funding increases through a new adequacy formula, updated distribution rules to improve predictability and stability for districts, and a commitment to closing the multi-billion-dollar adequacy gap identified by the courts over time. Statewide, the plan is described as adding nearly **\$900 million** in new funding for pre-K through 12 public schools when adequacy, BEF, and special education increases are combined, with the largest gains flowing to historically underfunded and high-need communities.

In Pennsylvania, only about 91% of students in public schools have access to arts education, because only 88% of public schools offer arts courses; that means roughly 10% of Pennsylvania students still lack access to arts education. Increased state funding—particularly through adequacy payments aimed at low-wealth districts—will help schools with little or no arts education programs create, restore, or sustain offerings in music, visual arts, theatre, and dance, ensuring that access is not determined by a community's property wealth.

While some may view music education as costly, a NAMM Foundation study found this is not the case. Among key findings were that the average per-student spending for music programs was \$251 when counting all students, and \$368 per music student when looking only at music participants, with districts spending about 1.9% of their total operating expenditures on music programs. Most music program spending—approximately 85.4%—supports music educator salaries, with the next three largest spending categories (materials and supplies, administration, and contracted services) together accounting for less than 10% of total music expenditures. This information is important to share with decision-makers at the state and local levels to demonstrate that, while music education is relatively inexpensive within an overall school district budget, it is critical that schools receive adequate state funding so they do not have to make cuts that adversely impact staffing and materials for music programs.

2. Support the Educator Pipeline

The Pennsylvania General Assembly should increase funding for the student teacher stipend program.

Context:

Currently a system is in place, funded at \$30 million, to support future educators. The program provides stipends approved through budget-related legislation. Student teachers are eligible for \$10,000 stipends and can earn an additional \$5,000 if they work in a district with high turnover. Governor Shapiro has proposed a \$5 million increase to this program to support future educators.

3. Increase Support for Higher Education

The Pennsylvania General Assembly should continue to increase funding for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and state-related universities. These schools are a valuable resource to Pennsylvania. Some of the finest music teacher preparation programs are housed in these universities. It is critical to provide funding to support adequate resources to prepare the next generation of music educators.

Context:

Pennsylvania continues to rank near the bottom nationally for higher education affordability, even as it relies heavily on PASSHE schools to develop students across many career areas. Many of the strongest music education programs in the Commonwealth are located at PASSHE universities, so sustained public investment directly supports access to high-quality music teacher preparation.

The 2026–27 Executive Budget builds on recent progress by maintaining PASSHE’s historically high 2025–26 operating appropriation (about \$661 million) and signaling that the system remains Pennsylvania’s most affordable four-year public option. Continued investments are necessary to ensure PASSHE universities can do what they were designed to do: provide an affordable college education, keep tuition growth in check, and preserve academic programs—including music education—that serve regional workforce needs.

As Pennsylvania taxpayers, we effectively own the PASSHE system and have a direct stake in protecting this public investment so it can remain a low-cost pathway into teaching and other high-need fields. Any funding increases for PASSHE and the state-related universities should benefit all students, help prevent near-term tuition spikes, and contribute to lower net tuition over the long term.

PMEA recognizes the need for more music educators to enter the profession, particularly as school districts face ongoing staffing challenges. Making higher education more affordable and removing barriers to entry—through stable operating support for PASSHE, strategic investments in state-related universities, and need-based grants—are essential to that goal. Pennsylvania can advance this work by continuing to support PASSHE at robust levels and by using the new performance-based funding for state-related universities to prioritize affordability, completion, and pathways into critical shortage areas like music education.



4. Licensure of Professional Music Therapists

The Pennsylvania General Assembly should support the licensure of professional music therapists in Pennsylvania, and 2026 is an opportune moment to advance this long-overdue step. Licensure would align Pennsylvania with a growing number of states that formally recognize music therapy as a regulated health profession and would help keep highly trained practitioners in the Commonwealth.

Context:

Having a license would increase access to music therapy services for many Pennsylvanians, protect consumers, and ensure that patients and clients receive quality, evidence-based care from appropriately trained professionals. Increased access through licensure can promote greater equity, reduce regional and financial barriers, and help ensure consistent, high-quality music therapy services across the Commonwealth.

Pennsylvania remains one of the largest “exporters” of musically trained therapists precisely because it does not yet offer licensure. After graduating from Pennsylvania’s colleges and universities, many newly credentialed music therapists relocate to surrounding states such as Maryland, Ohio, New Jersey, and Virginia, where licensure and clearer professional pathways already exist. This represents a direct loss of talent that Pennsylvania has invested in educating and training.

The Commonwealth hosts more university-based music therapy programs than any other state, with ten collegiate programs, including master’s and doctoral offerings. Yet the proportion of graduates leaving Pennsylvania to practice has continued to rise, from about 40% in 2019 to an estimated 60% today. Licensure would give these graduates a clear reason to stay, stabilizing and expanding the in-state workforce.

Music therapy licensure is safe, effective, and already in place in more than a dozen states across the country. Music therapy is an established health profession in which credentialed practitioners use instrumental and vocal music—within a therapeutic relationship—to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs for individuals across the lifespan. These services use musical experiences to facilitate changes that are non-musical in nature, such as improved communication, reduced anxiety, or enhanced motor functioning.

In Pennsylvania today, some form of music therapy is being used in the vast majority of counties and serves tens of thousands of individuals in health and human services settings. These include in-home services, senior centers, nursing homes, hospitals, rehabilitation clinics, behavioral and mental health centers, developmental disability programs, early intervention services, and schools. Demand for these services is likely to grow as populations age and as behavioral health needs increase.

Music therapy is also a cost-effective treatment option. Licensure could drive job growth by encouraging new professionals to move to Pennsylvania (or return after training) to practice in a regulated environment that recognizes their full scope of work. State-supported facilities that provide music therapy services may experience cost savings when music therapy is used to reduce key cost drivers—for example, shorter length of stay in neonatal intensive care units or greater efficiency and patient cooperation during medical procedures in perioperative settings.

Taken together, licensure of professional music therapists would help Pennsylvania retain its own graduates, expand access to high-quality services, protect consumers, and create opportunities for cost savings in health and human services systems—making it a sound policy choice for 2026.

Issues five, six, and seven below are supported by PMEAs but will not be included on the document distributed to members of the General Assembly. We continue to work on these issues with appropriate stakeholders and will bring these issues to legislators when/if it is appropriate.

5. Support Alternative Credit for Marching Band Participation

The Pennsylvania General Assembly should pass legislation allowing students who participate in high school marching band to receive an alternative course credit. Other states (Alabama, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas) have policies in place that allow for at least some credit for student participation in marching band (in these states the credit counts toward physical education requirements). Local boards of education would determine if their local education agency would offer such a credit.

Context:

Students participating in curricular based high school marching band programs are physically active and learn valuable life lessons through participation. These programs typically last at least one semester (if not two), yet some students are unable to participate or can only participate during a regularly scheduled music class for a limited time because of scheduling issues and other school-based requirements.

As Pennsylvania has standards in all subject areas, any legislation should require the adherence to them for any marching band credit to be awarded. Local education agencies would have the option to decide if they would offer this credit in their schools. This credit would be in addition to course credit the student receives for participate in a curricular based music class that includes marching band as a component. A blanket state mandate is not our goal, rather we hope the General Assembly would give schools the option to decide to implement this credit program as they see fit.

One way to implement this in a school district is for the marching band teacher to collaborate with the physical education teacher to ensure that any student receiving physical education credit for marching band participation meets all established physical education standards. The physical education teacher could then verify and sign off that the student has successfully met these standards for course completion.



One goal of this proposal is to ease the burden on music students who are often forced to make a choice between music courses and other areas of study because there is a limited amount of course time during the school day. By allowing marching band students the option to receive some additional course credit for another subject (while fulfilling the requirements of that subject through marching band participation), the students will have more opportunities to study other courses offered in their school.

Implementing an alternative credit option would work best if all educators involved can work together to ensure education acquired through marching band are used as an activity reflecting other required standards.

6. PDE Arts Content Advisor / Liaison

PMEA supports reinstatement of the funded Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) staff position that supervises the development of curriculum and standards in five content areas: *Music, Visual Art, Theatre, Dance, and Media Arts*.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education should work with **the Pennsylvania General Assembly** to reinstate this staff position that was removed from the PDE Curriculum staff in the 2011-12 state budget. PDE leadership is encouraged to review key pieces of federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), for ways to fund this position by way of federally available money. Specifically, Title IV, Section 4104 of ESSA addresses such a possibility.

Context:

The essence of this ask is to make sure the arts have someone available to support and disseminate information from the state level to arts teachers. Other content areas have advisors already in place. This position has been vacant but is necessary to provide support, professional development and technical assistance to educators across the state and to colleagues within the PDE. Some roles of the PDE position include:

- Curriculum support, solicitation and review of materials and resources on the SAS portal
- Implementation guidance and support of content specific curriculum as it relates to development of the Student Learning Objectives design to be used for teacher evaluation
- Active representation in the State Education Agencies Directors of Arts Education (SEADAE) including direct access to the NCCAS arts assessment item bank
- Development and review of arts specific professional development
- Support to arts education organizations regarding Act 48 professional development offerings
- Development, monitoring and support professional online learning communities

There is currently a part-time contract position at PDE serving this purpose. We feel strongly that this should be a full-time staffed position.

7. Establish a Statewide Arts Diploma Seal

The Pennsylvania Department of Education should establish a statewide high school graduation diploma seal in arts that certifies students' proficiency in the arts, directs rigorous coursework in disciplines such as music, dance, theatre, visual arts, and media arts, and recognizes students who elect an arts endorsement pathway, complete a sustained sequence of arts coursework with a minimum grade point average, and demonstrate their learning through a capstone or similar culminating project.

Context:

Creating a statewide arts diploma seal in Pennsylvania would formally recognize students who pursue an intentional, rigorous pathway in the arts, beyond minimum graduation requirements. The seal would encourage students to elect an arts endorsement early in high school, complete a sustained sequence of arts coursework with strong academic performance, and demonstrate their learning through a capstone or similar culminating project—providing a clear, transcript-level signal of proficiency and readiness for postsecondary study and careers in creative and technical fields.

The arts diploma seal would also complement Pennsylvania’s existing graduation pathways framework by offering an additional, clearly branded way for students to demonstrate readiness in a specific content area, while elevating the status of arts learning within the broader high school experience. By incentivizing districts to maintain and expand high-quality arts programs, the seal would strengthen local school offerings, support student engagement, and help prepare a pipeline of graduates with the creative, collaborative, and technical skills needed in the Commonwealth’s evolving workforce.

How To Advocate

Your voice is important to advocate for music and arts education. Your voice is crucial to ensure music and arts programs continue as part of education for every child in Pennsylvania.

Conversations in your local community are crucial to future success. Making school administrators aware of the good things happening in music and arts classrooms is the best form of advocacy you can do. Advocacy is marketing. Remember these points as you market your program:

- Know your audience. What will resonate with them?
- Arts are important on their own – it’s important to create well-rounded citizens who can appreciate culture
- Promote the academic benefits, but also promote those benefits that can’t be measured on a test like teamwork, self-esteem and problem solving
- Tell stories of student successes
- Use different communication channels - social media, websites, emails to parents, emails to administrators and communication with your local media are all important ways to communicate the value of your program
- Even in the face of adversity in your school, your program and/or your classroom – it is important to stay relentlessly positive about your program

Visit advocacy.pmea.net There you can learn about current funding opportunities in Pennsylvania. Learn about opportunities and how to work with your administrators to access these funds.

While you are at advocacy.pmea.net, you can take action on some of the policy issues raised in this document. PMEA makes that process easy by asking you to enter some basic contact information and you’ll be able to send a pre-written letter to your representatives in the Pennsylvania General Assembly. PMEA will send out email alerts when those opportunities are available.



- Resource for PMEA Members
- Designed by PMEA Members
- Ideas To Promote Your Program
- Customizable Marketing and Recruiting Templates
- Images To Use in Program Books and Other Marketing Materials



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