

ISSUE 006



# fireworks

The magazine for the BBB community







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## Tuning up our brain for the test

As a music teacher, how often have we heard the phrase, “I have to skip rehearsal, I have a test”? In my school, as in many schools, we have our only rehearsal time in the morning prior to school starting, and I hear this comment regularly through the school year.

Sometimes I ask the students what they will be doing instead of coming to rehearsal. A common answer is “I need to study”, to which I wonder how effective study done one hour before the test begins will actually be for the outcome. Research into effective test and exam preparation has shown that last minute cramming does not guarantee improved test results. Indeed, in one study they found napping was more beneficial to learning outcomes than cramming.[1]

Another common answer is “I will be too nervous/worried/hyped up” to play my instrument. This answer makes me wonder if this is the best emotional state for students to be in prior to a test or exam. Research has shown that students with higher test anxiety tend to perform worse on exams.[2]

If cramming before the test and experiencing worry and anxiety before the test is unlikely to improve the test score, why don't they just come to rehearsal? This approach speaks to the idea that students might as well come to rehearsal because they don't have anything else to do.

But what if we could change the reason why students should attend music rehearsal before a test. Students could see the music rehearsal prior to a test as a valuable, even essential, part of their preparation to ensure they perform as well as possible on the test.

Let's take the nervous/worried/hyped up factor before a test. Making music together has been found to lower cortisol levels which means students could normalise their pre-test stress and enter the test space with lowered anxiety.[3]



1. McIntyre, S. H., & Munson, J. M. (2008). Exploring cramming: Student behaviors, beliefs, and learning retention in the principles of marketing course. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 30(3), 226-243.

2. Richardson, M., Abraham, C., & Bond, R. (2012). Psychological correlates of university students' academic performance: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological bulletin*, 138(2), 353.

3. Vollert, J. O., Störk, T., Rose, M., & Möckel, M. (2003). Music as adjuvant therapy for coronary heart disease. Therapeutic music lowers anxiety, stress and beta-endorphin concentrations in patients from a coronary sport group. *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift* (1946), 128(51-52), 2712-2716.

4. Greenberg, D. M., Decety, J., & Gordon, I. (2021). The social neuroscience of music: Understanding the social brain through human song. *American Psychologist*, 76(7), 1172.



Making music together can heighten serotonin levels, which can help students feel more connected with their peers and less alone as they enter the heightened experience of a test. It can also activate our dopamine response through our reward network and can elevate our motivation to perform well in the test.[4]

Making music together can help synchronise the brain, leading to improved overall processing[5] and analytical thinking and problem-solving capacities.[6]

The list could go on and on but in a nutshell, attending music rehearsal in the morning before a test, or in the afternoon before a study session, can put students in an optimum cognitive state for test preparation and performance. Could it be that music learning can be the secret weapon in academic performance, as well as happier and calmer students who can approach challenges with a brain primed for success?



[Students] participating in musical activities showed greater change over time and overall better academic examination outcomes. The longer that they had been playing the greater the impact.

HALLAM, S. & ROGERS, K. (2016). The impact of instrumental music learning on attainment at age 16: A pilot study. *British Journal of Music Education*.



**Music learning can be the secret weapon in academic performance, creating happier and calmer students who can approach challenges with a brain primed for success.**



5. Thompson, E. C., White-Schwoch, T., Tierney, A., & Kraus, N. (2015). Beat synchronization across the lifespan: Intersection of development and musical experience. *PLoS one*, 10(6), e0128839.

6. Tervaniemi, M., Tao, S., & Huotilainen, M. (2018, October). Promises of music in education?. In *Frontiers in education*(Vol. 3, p. 74). Frontiers Media SA.



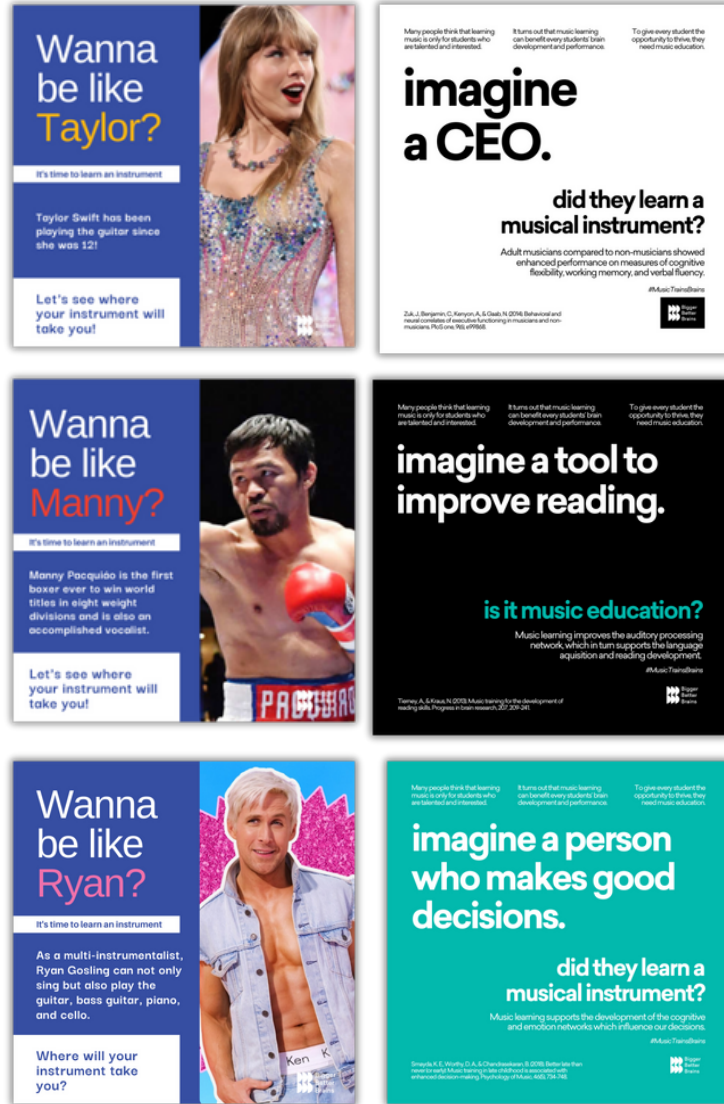
# WHAT'S NEW IN BBB+

The BBB website is constantly growing with new resources and tools that you can use straight away. Check out some of the new items we have loaded into the BBB+ hub since our previous Fireworks edition!

## The new BBB+ Member Area

We recently unveiled BBB+ Members Area is receiving rave reviews from our members, particularly for its impressive search feature.

Looking for a Student Activity? No worries! Simply click on the relevant category, and voila! All your options magically appear.



Search bar feature



500+ tools, research and resources



Mobile friendly

## Creative Campaigns

Exclusive to Premium BBB+ Members, our creative social media campaigns offer a unique opportunity. Extensive research over the years has revealed that impacting your community requires multiple touchpoints.

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Whether you're targeting students, parents, or fellow teachers, we've designed campaigns that cater to everyone—simply choose what suits you best!

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