

Apr 11th, 4:00 PM - 4:30 PM

# Advocating for Students with Autism: How to Best Engage and Equip Your Student with Autism to Excel in the Music Classroom

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Kastelein, Mackenzie C., "Advocating for Students with Autism: How to Best Engage and Equip Your Student with Autism to Excel in the Music Classroom" (2018). *The Research and Scholarship Symposium*. 5.

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# Advocacy for Students with Autism



*How to Best Engage and Equip Your Student with Autism to  
Excel in the Music Classroom  
By: Mackenzie Kastelein*

# Premise of Research:

Compare what is occurring in music classrooms today with research on how to provide the optimal educational experience for students with autism.

Provide insight for music educators on how to best engage students with autism to excel in and outside of the music classroom.





WHAT IS

**AUTISM**



# DSM-5 Definition

- Persistent deficits in social communication and social interactions across multiple contexts
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
- Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period
- Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning
- Disturbances are not better explained by intellectual disability or global developmental delay

Children on the autism spectrum often range widely in their cognitive functioning, but **socialization and communication issues** tend to be the underlying motivators for behavioral issues.

# Clarifying Communication



## Types of Communication:

- Verbal
  - Receptive Communication
  - Expressive Communication
- Non-Verbal
  - Urge to Socialize
  - Ability to Socialize

### **Remember-**

Verbal communication is NOT always an issue for people with autism. Non-verbal communication is an area of impairment for all people with autism.


What is...

# THE ABILITY TO SOCIALIZE?

- pragmatic language
- knowledge of “unwritten rules”
- understanding importance
- symbolic play skills
- ability to achieve “joint attention”
- Non-verbal transmission of  
language







**Difficulty with socialization and communication causes a “failure to understand,” resulting in behavioral issues.**

i.e - anxiousness, insistence on sameness, distress over minor environmental changes, concrete and literal interpretation of situations, inattentiveness, rude behavior, tendency to “hang back” from peers, socially unwelcome attitude, and a greater interest in objects rather than people.



# Legal Information

Terms to know:

1. LRE (Least Restrictive Environment)
2. IEP (Individualized Education Program)
3. 504 Plan
4. IDEA (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)
5. FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education)

# Tips for how to handle the legal labyrinth:

- Cultivate open communication with other educators
- LRE does not always mean full inclusion
- Insert yourself into the conversation (be a part of the IEP)



“Because autism manifests differently in each individual, when an educator has taught *one* student with autism, she has learned about only *one* student with autism. The educator may then proceed to learn about a second student with autism and find that each student enters the music classroom with a wide array of needs.”

-Alice Hammel and Ryan Hourigan



**AUTISM**