

MUSIC THERAPY AS A SPECIAL EDUCATION RELATED SERVICE IN K-12 SCHOOLS

MARK A. BELFAST, JR.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF MUSIC EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

A primary purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is to ensure all children with disabilities have access to related services designed to meet their needs. The law identifies a number of related services for which students with disabilities qualify, at no cost to them, should the service be necessary for the student to receive a free and appropriate public education. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education identified music therapy as a related service under IDEA.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, serious mental health problems, such as self-injurious behaviors and suicide, are on the rise, particularly among youth. Thus, there is a need for accessible, flexible, effective, and sustainable therapeutic options, like music therapy, for students and teachers in American schools. Furthermore, music therapy interventions can positively affect an individual's mental and physical health, and a growing body of research has focused on the use of music therapy in school settings.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which music therapy is used as a special education related service in K-12 school systems. Specifically, I sought to determine: (1) the extent to which music therapists are utilized by K-12 school systems in the Southern Division of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), (2) perceived barriers that might prevent music therapy services from being offered in school systems, (3) strategies for successful incorporation of music therapy services in school systems, and (4) school officials' attitudes related to music therapy services being offered to students in their schools.

The study utilized a researcher-designed online questionnaire. Participants ($N = 75$) were special education administrators associated with K-12 school systems in 10 states. Music therapy was found to be used as a special education related service in four states; however, 83% of all respondents indicated music therapy was not used in their specific school system. Furthermore, when music therapy was used, participants noted it was used infrequently.

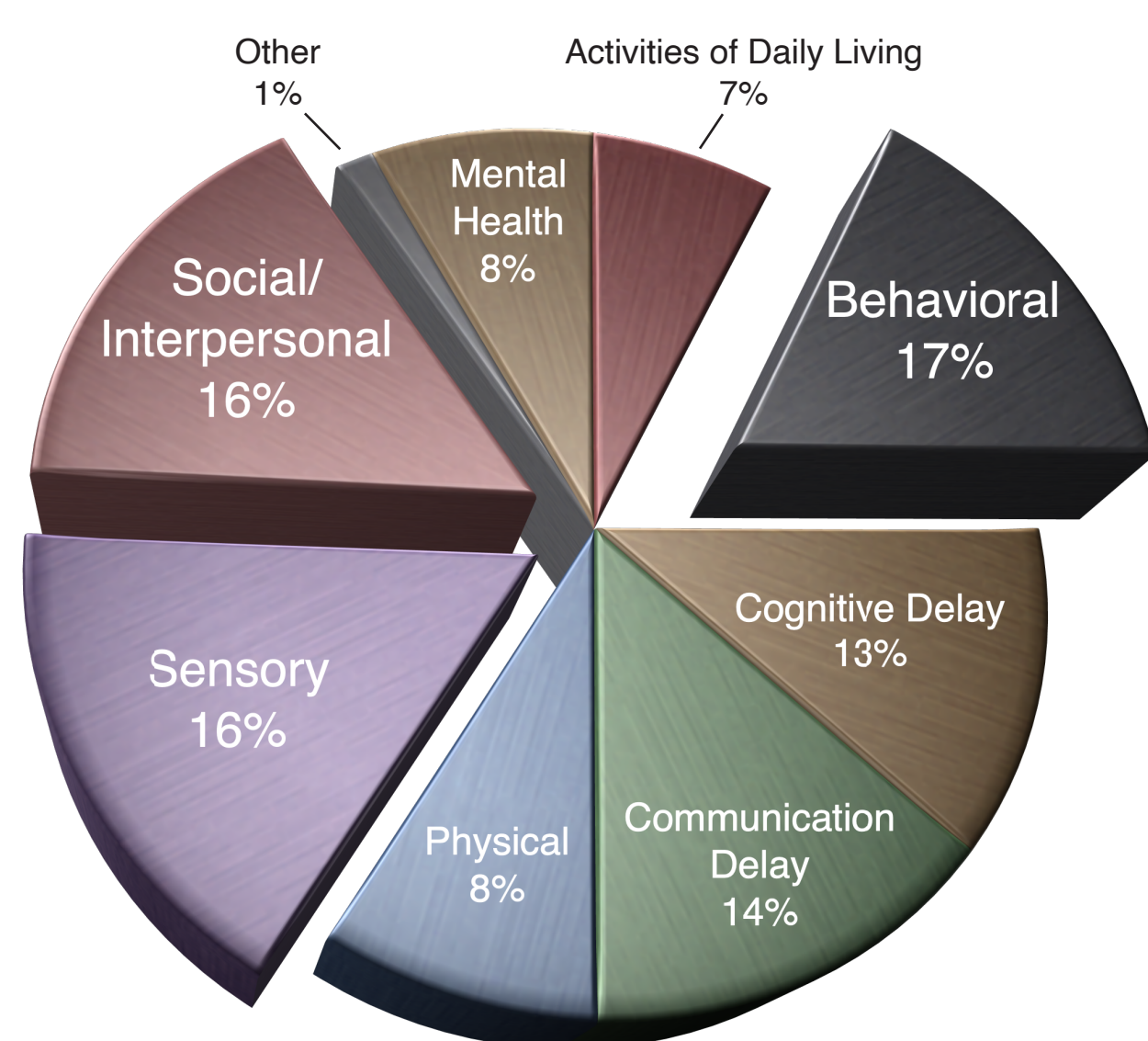
Barriers preventing the incorporation of music therapy include a lack of understanding what music therapy is and how it can support students in schools, lack of funding, and an insufficient number of available music therapists. Nevertheless, 93% of special education administrators in districts that did not provide music therapy believed their students would benefit from music therapy services. As such, future programs related to music therapy advocacy are and awareness would be highly beneficial.

WHAT IS MUSIC THERAPY?

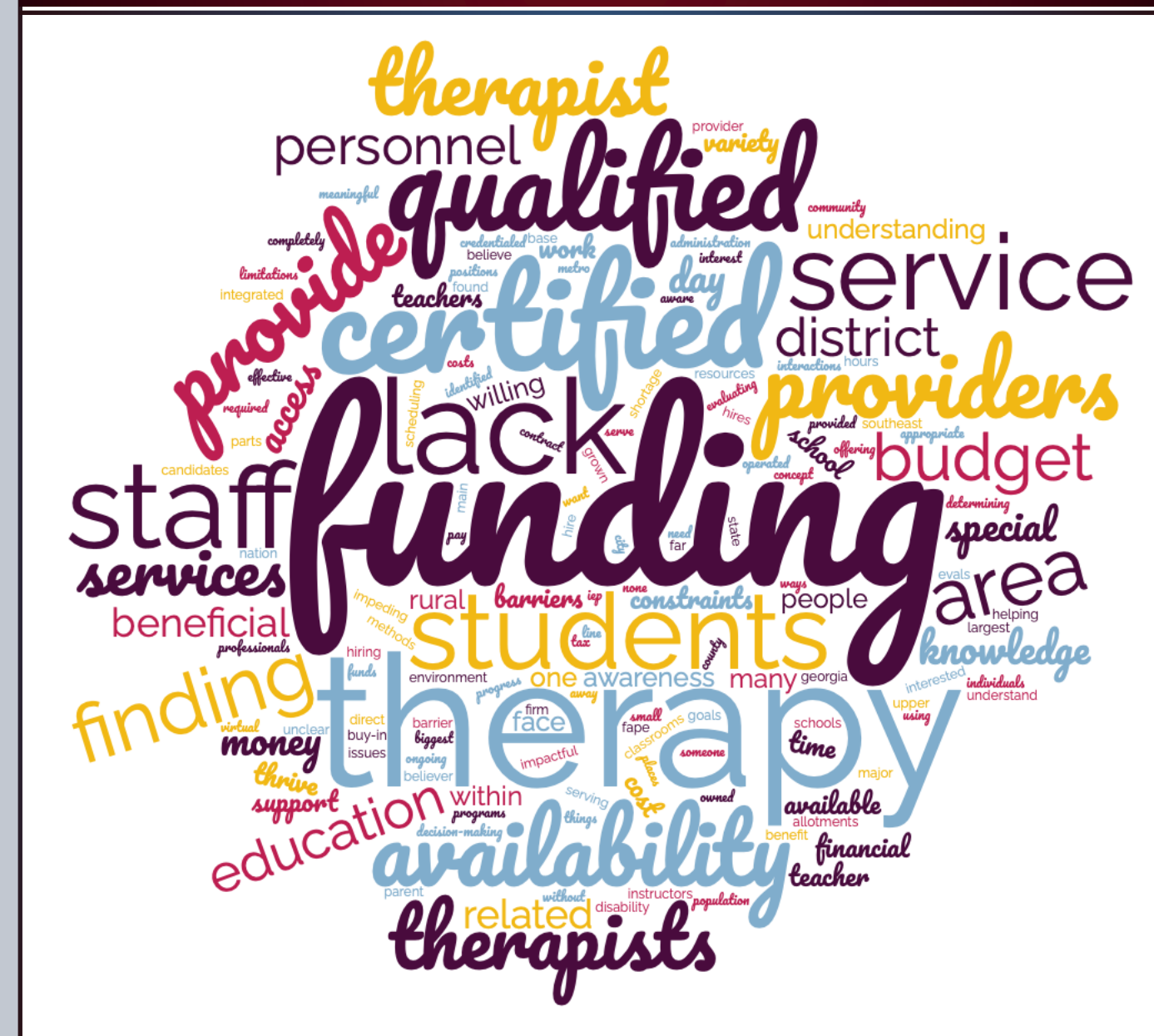
Music therapy is the clinical and evidenced-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program.

– American Music Therapy Association

NEEDS ADDRESSED w/ MT



BARRIERS TO INCLUSION



NAfME SOUTHERN DIVISION STATES

Reported Use of Music Therapy in Schools

YES	NO
ALABAMA	FLORIDA
GEORGIA	KENTUCKY
SOUTH CAROLINA	LOUISIANA
VIRGINIA	MISSISSIPPI
	TENNESSEE
	WEST VIRGINIA

Note. The Southern Division of NAfME includes 11 states. No responses were received from North Carolina.



CONTACT