



Unit 5 Named a *Best Community* *for Music Education* for Fifth Consecutive Year

McLean County Unit District No. 5 has been honored with the Best Communities for Music Education (BCME) Award from The NAMM Foundation for its outstanding support and commitment to music education. The 2026 recognition marks the fifth consecutive year Unit 5 has received the national designation.

Now in its 27th year, the Best Communities for Music Education program spotlights and celebrates school districts across the United States for exemplary dedication to music education and ongoing efforts to ensure equitable access to music learning as part of a well-rounded education. In 2026, more than 1,000 schools and districts nationwide were recognized for outstanding achievement in providing access to high-quality music education.

Unit 5 is home to a comprehensive music program that begins in the elementary grades and continues through high school. Music instruction reaches virtually all elementary students, while secondary students have access to a broad range of curricular and performance opportunities in general, vocal, and instrumental music. Students experience classical, jazz, world music, contemporary music, and other genres while developing skills through listening, creating, singing, playing, composing, and performing.

Unit 5 has maintained its Best Communities for Music Education designation through the combined efforts of outstanding student musicians, highly qualified music educators, and partnership with families, administrators, and a community that values arts education. Across the district, music programs emphasize collaboration, innovation, artistry, and excellence, beginning with students' earliest musical experiences and building skills and opportunities that extend beyond high school graduation.

Current Unit 5 musicians include Illinois Music Education Association All-District and All-State musicians, students preparing to pursue music at the collegiate level, and recipients of college and university music scholarships. Unit 5 alumni include leading music educators, professional performers, composers, and music industry professionals.

The reach of Unit 5 music extends well beyond Central Illinois. District ensembles have performed on some of the world's notable stages, including Carnegie Hall in New York, the Sydney Opera House in Australia, Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, and performance venues in London.

Unit 5's music educators are also active leaders in their profession. Faculty members serve in leadership roles with organizations including the Illinois Music Education Association, American String Teachers Association, and Illinois High School Association; present at state and professional conferences; provide professional development for educators across Illinois; participate in professional organizations and honor societies; and have received recognition from the Illinois State Board of Education and other professional organizations.

Being named one of the Best Communities for Music Education reflects both the breadth of musical opportunities available to Unit 5 students and the community that sustains them. Students are encouraged to experience music in many ways — as listeners, creators, performers, collaborators, and lifelong participants in the arts.

Recipients of the 2026 BCME Awards were selected through a comprehensive application and review process evaluating key indicators including funding, instructional time, participation rates, facilities, and community support.

About The NAMM Foundation

The NAMM Foundation is the charitable arm of the National Association of Music Merchants, the global trade association for the music products industry. The foundation works to remove systemic barriers that limit access to music-making and career pathways in the music industry. By investing in ideas and innovative solutions, the foundation works to build inclusive and thriving musical communities.

