Little is currently known about parental cognitions as they relate to children’s participation in different types of formal music education programs. What motivates parents to enroll children in formal music education programs? Do parents perceive any changes in their children’s behaviors and attitudes after a few years of formal music education? To address these questions, I conducted interviews with parents of children (aged 3-13), who were attending different formal music education programs including an El Sistema-inspired program, Suzuki-based strings programs, conservatory-based strings programs, and an early childhood music program. Interviewees came from different SES, cultural and ethnic groups. They answered questions about family musical background, motivations to enroll children in formal programs, and children’s musical engagement in everyday life, in and out of schools. Parents were also asked to report if they saw any changes in their children or family life following their enrollment in formal music education. Findings suggested some similarities across parental responses, including the desire to have children learn new skills and develop a love of music. Some parents, irrespective of the programs their children were in, also spoke about learning to play an instrument as something that they always wanted but could not do. Yet, differences in parental responses also emerged. While some parents from underserved communities described music as an activity that would keep children away from potential everyday life risks, parents from wealthier backgrounds typically spoke about the benefits of music learning for children’s brain, cognitive, and emotional development. By contrast, parents of young children spoke mainly about the role of early childhood music programs in social development. Taken together, findings suggest that parental motivations to enroll children in music may vary as a function of children’s age and social class. These and other findings will be presented, along with implications for music teaching and learning.