

Telling the Story: Advocating for Music

A majority of **those outside the fields of music and the arts** do not understand the whys or the hows concerning the process of arts education. **Provided with a clear understanding** of those whys and hows, and supported by quality arts education in practice, **people begin to realize the value of music and arts education.**

If the school board and district administrators are kept well-informed of the benefits that an education in the arts provide, and if this information is supported by sound classroom practices, chances are that the district will favor decisions that strengthen the programs rather than weakening or eliminating them.

Influencing the Realities in Arts Education

- **Shifting educational priorities and budgeting priorities** means that no music or arts educator can afford to consider his or her program immune to cutbacks. When arts educators fail to prepare for potential problems, or deny the potential threat of being seriously diminished or eliminated, the stage is set for disaster.
- **Being a music educator means much more than teaching music to the students in the music classroom.** It involves educating **EVERYONE** in the school environment—parents, faculty colleagues, administrators and the community at large. It is the educator's job to provide administrators with everything they need to know to effectively advocate for the music program.

Effective Ways to Build the Music Program

Ignorance Isn't Bliss

- Stay informed
- Collect and disseminate information appropriately
- Know what is happening in other parts of the school as well as district-wide
- Join an arts advocacy organization

You Gotta Have Friends

- Know your constituency
- Think of students as constituents
- Build a communication system
- Make sure your constituents know how to reach you

Simon Says. . .

- Be prepared
- Set up phone and e-mail trees
- Keep constituents informed
- Disseminate information on a regular basis
- Initiate dialogue
- Establish a fine arts booster group
- Personally invite all constituents to attend arts events, informances and performances
- Thank constituents for attending
- Invite constituents into the classroom
- Provide opportunities to learn about the process of making music

Get Real!

- Talk with students about the value of arts education
- Discuss with students what you are teaching
- Discuss with students what they are learning
- Discuss with students how these skills relate to their real world of school, work and life

Birds of a Feather

- Be a team player
- Be regarded as a leader
- Treat your friends as allies
- Discuss issues of mutual concern
- Remember: *United we stand, divided we fail*
- Become a unit: “The Fine Arts Department”
- Point out critical interdisciplinary links
- Offer to collaborate with others and to play a key role

Start with a Single Step

- Get your program on your school board agenda
- Know the budget process
- Review the school board agenda several days before every meeting. Look for items that might impact your program (for example: budget cuts, graduation requirements, staffing reductions)

- Don't assume that everyone agrees that students need or benefit from an education in the arts
- Think of advocacy as nothing more than effective public relations
- Use advocacy in a positive way—it's the “good news” about music education
- Make advocacy a way of life
- Advocate daily with students and teacher colleagues
- Develop “partnerhips” and collaborations that are win-win
- Ensure that all constituents realize their responsibility to be good advocates
- Equip students to be your best advocates

Nothing is Carved in Stone

- Don't assume—you rarely have all the information.
- Fatal Assumption #1: Those you assume are decision-makers, really are decision-makers.
- Fatal Assumption #2: The decision-makers will never change their minds.
- Fatal Assumption #3: The decision-makers will always stay the same.
- Fatal Assumption #4: The environment in which your program exists will always remain the same.
- Fatal Assumption #5: The rationale you believe in has universal acceptance.

An Apple a Day

- Know your vulnerabilities
- Work to correct those vulnerabilities

Just a Reminder

The real issues are often about power and the allocation of resources—that spells p-o-l-i-t-i-c-s.

Keep the Focus

Although politics will likely be a component, the focus of arts education advocacy is whether students have access to the quality arts programs they need and deserve.

Want more tips for keeping music strong in your schools?

Visit the site devoted to all things music advocacy: www.supportmusic.com

TIP 12