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## Texas Music Educators Association

To: TMEA members

From: Robert Floyd, Executive Director

We have developed this News Media Toolkit to help you get local news coverage of the activities and accomplishments of students in your music program. This is part of an effort to increase awareness of the many benefits of music education in our schools. Our goal is to build support for music education among parents, administrators, school boards and legislators to ensure the continuation and possible expansion of music programs.

We want to enlist your assistance in this important statewide effort and encourage you to seek more news coverage by your local newspapers, radio stations, television stations, web sites and any other media that provide information to the public in your community.

It is vitally important to remember that every contact you have with the news media is an opportunity to promote the wide variety of benefits that music education provides not only to students but also to our schools, communities and our state.

Here is the basic message we hope to communicate to the public and policy makers: Music education in our schools helps Texas attain its education goals by improving overall academic performance and making students better prepared for college and careers.

We want to convince policy makers that music is not an isolated segment of education but an integral and important part of a successful education system and contributes to broader objectives such as improving student achievement, reducing dropout rates, increasing economic opportunities, making our communities more livable and expanding the state's economy.

We hope you will assist us in this effort to give Texans a better understanding of how music education benefits our schools, our communities and our state. If we are successful in this effort, it will help assure that music education receives the priority and the support it needs and deserves in our education system.

Please put the information included in this toolkit to good use in your community and help us build a strong future for music education in Texas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert M. Floyd". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Robert Floyd  
Executive Director

# *Effective Messaging*

A good message is one that tells a story that people find interesting and meaningful to their own lives.

Every time you have contact with a reporter or editor, it is an opportunity to deliver a message. In addition to providing information about a specific event, you should put that event in the larger context of the larger picture and explain that it is part of an overall program that benefits students, the school and the community.

For example, an end of the year concert by the school band or orchestra is not just an opportunity for students to demonstrate how much they accomplished during the year. You can explain how the performance in front of an audience helps build self-confidence and teamwork skills; it involves family members and friends in the activities of the school and it provides a source of entertainment for the community. Sending out a news release to announce an upcoming end of the year concert is an opportunity to highlight how many students participated in the music program during the year, how many received awards, what percentage of music students made the honor roll, how many seniors plan to attend college, what majors they plan to pursue and how many have received college scholarship offers.

In your news release, you can make a general statement about the benefits of music education and then back it up with facts and figures. For example, you could include a quote such as: “Music education provides students with learning skills that help them in all their other courses. This year our band members who took the SAT test had an average score of 1210, well above the average of 1098 for the entire school and the state average of 995.”

Information like this makes a better news story for reporters and helps deliver the message that there are many benefits from music education in the school.

As music educators, we have a great story to tell and we should look for every possible opportunity to tell it.

## *Broadening the message*

Fortunately, there are many people who already understand the importance of music education in our schools because they enjoy music, have performed music or have a child or friend involved in a music program. Most of these people already support our goals. Unfortunately, there are others, who may be in policy-making positions, who do not consider music instruction as a priority in our education system. Instead of arguing that those people have their priorities wrong, we can broaden our message to convince them that music education provides a variety of benefits that can contribute to success in other areas. There are many ways that music education relates to other issues that may be higher priorities to policy makers.

The following are some suggested messages you can incorporate into your news media contacts that could be effective in broadening the base of support for music education among the public, administrators and elected officials:

- Music education can improve student performance that is reflected in campus accountability measures and school rankings.
- Music instruction improves overall academic performance because the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in the music include many of the same concepts and skills as the TEKS in math, science, reading and social studies. Thus, the music can help students learn the skills and content that are tested by TAKS.
- Research has proven a direct correlation between improved test scores and the length of time spent studying the music.
- At-risk students who are involved in music programs are less likely to drop out of school.
- Music education in public schools contributes to future economic development and job creation in the state.
- The cultural arts have a substantial impact on the Texas economy and account for 15.7 percent of the state's permanent jobs and 13.6 percent of the state's gross product, according to a study by The Perryman Group in 2001.
- Success in global economic competition in the years ahead will require a creative and innovative workforce and our education system must provide opportunities for students to develop their creative talents through arts education.
- Music education promotes creativity and cognitive ability that give job applicants a competitive advantage in seeking high-skill jobs.

# *Making News*

## How to get local news coverage

### *Know your media market*

News organizations usually do not think of their coverage areas as being a particular city or county but as a marketing area that can be as small as a single neighborhood or as large as a dozen counties.

In large media markets such as Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston and other major cities, the market extends out beyond the suburban areas and includes millions of households. Even though there are dozens of media outlets in these major markets, it is much more difficult to get local coverage of small events because there is so much competition for the limited newspaper space and radio and television airtime. Many large daily newspapers have localized editions targeting specific geographical parts of the metropolitan area. And, these local editions often have space regularly devoted to neighborhood news and calendars of local events that provide opportunities for coverage. Large newspapers may have special sections devoted to local education or arts coverage each week. Major metropolitan areas also may have neighborhood or suburban newspapers that are entirely devoted to local news coverage and these publications are often eager to receive local news items. Because radio and television stations are unable to localize their coverage, it is much more difficult to get their attention or receive coverage for small events or school news. The best approach to obtaining television coverage in large markets is through feature or human-interest stories that provide an opportunity for interesting video and audio to accompany the story.

Smaller media markets usually present better opportunities for obtaining local news coverage. They also provide a better opportunity for you to develop an ongoing relationship with an editor or reporter who covers education news. Even so, you need to be aware that there is competition for space and airtime and newspapers and stations will try to balance their coverage to include news from every part of their market area. Your news items still must be newsworthy and don't expect to receive more than your share of coverage.

Regardless of the size of your market, you should do a comprehensive search and make a listing of all the news sources that cover your area. Don't limit your search to just traditional newspapers, radio stations and television stations. Seek out community bulletin boards, local calendars of events, special interest publications, local web blogs and newsletters.

### *Know your news organizations*

Before making any contact with a news organization, do as much research as you can about each one. The best place to start is the organization's web page. These web

sites usually include contact information and directions on submitting news items but they rarely tell you everything you need to know. After you have gathered as much information as you can from the Internet, you will probably need to call each organization for more detailed information.

Here is a list of information you need about each news organization:

- What is the deadline for submitting local news items and events?
- How do they prefer to receive news releases -- by mail, fax or email?
- What is the phone number or email address for submissions?
- Should news releases be directed to the attention of a particular individual?
- If they prefer email submissions, do they want the news release in the body of the email or as an attachment?
- If the news release is an email attachment, do they prefer a word processing document or a .pdf file?
- Is there a specific editor or reporter assigned to cover education or fine arts news?
- Is there a feature editor or reporter assigned to human interest stories?
- Do they accept photographs or only use those taken by their own photographers?

Most news organizations are glad to provide this information and do it routinely because it makes their jobs easier. Following each organizations guidelines and preferences will increase your chances of getting coverage.

### *Writing a news release*

Always submit your news in writing to make it easy on the news organization and to ensure that the information they receive is correct. Do not call and expect them to take the information down over the phone.

Make certain that the contact person is available to answer any questions or provide additional information. **Always return phone calls from reporters as soon as possible because they may be up against a deadline.**

News releases should be written in “newspaper style,” that means following the same rules for punctuation, abbreviation, spelling and grammar used by most newspapers. The closer you follow the style rules, the more professional your news release will look. The best-known stylebooks are the Associated Press Stylebook and The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage. Another good resource is the Associated Press Guide to Newswriting. They may be available in your library or from a journalism class at your school and they can be purchased online.

Here are some guidelines for writing a news release:

- Always include the name of a contact person with a telephone number and/or email address at the top of the news release, separate from the body of the release. Do not include the contact name and number in the body of the news release unless you want it published and available to the public.
- Always put the current date at the top of the news release.
- The lead, or first paragraph, should be simple and answer three of the basic news questions: Who, what and when.
- Use the “inverted pyramid” with the most important information at the top and the least important at the bottom.
- Use short sentences and short paragraphs.
- Avoid using professional jargon, abbreviations or terms the average person may not understand.
- If possible, allow someone to read a draft of the news release to check for errors, completeness and clarity.
- Limit the length to one page single-spaced or two pages double-spaced.
- Below the last line of the news release, center “-end-“ or “###” to indicate the ending.
- Keep the format plain and simple using standard type sizes and fonts: Arial or Times Roman.

Smaller newspapers may publish the entire news release word for word but you should never expect nor insist that they do so. A news release is not the same as purchasing an ad. With a news release, you are requesting free coverage and the news organization is free to edit, rewrite and shorten your news release.

After you have submitted a news release, it is acceptable to follow up with a phone call to confirm that the organization received it but do not ask them to contact you to confirm they have received it. Remember, you want to make their job as easy as possible.

## *Tips for working with the media*

- **Know their deadlines.** Make certain you know each news organization's deadline for submitting news and make every effort to submit your news at least one day before the deadline. Small, weekly publications may have a deadline three or four days before the publication date.
- **Don't play favorites.** You want to get as many news organizations as possible to cover your news. Organizations in the same media market compete against each other and do not like having a competitor receiving favored treatment. Give the same information to all news organizations at the same time, or consistent with their deadlines.
- **Nothing is off the record.** It is always better to assume that anything you say to an editor or a reporter will be published or aired. News organizations have complicated rules for "off the record," "not for attribution," "for background only," and other forms of receiving information. Try to avoid this situation. Don't expect a reporter to agree not to use something after you have said it. Anything off the record must be agreed to in advance.
- **Return phone calls promptly.** An editor or a reporter may be up against a deadline and seeking clarification or confirmation of information. If they don't hear back from you, your news release may not get published.
- **Look for help.** If you know a journalism teacher or a student taking a journalism course, they may be able to help you by writing or editing your news releases and by providing information about local news organizations.
- **Prepare for interviews.** If a reporter asks for an interview, take time to organize your thoughts and your message before the interview. Always have a message – two or three major points that you want to communicate to the public through the reporter. After an interview, feel free to follow up with the reporter with additional information or to clarify something you said.
- **Corrections.** If a news report contains an error, contact the reporter or editor as soon as possible to let them know. Mistakes will happen and you should not get angry about it or demand a correction. Most news organizations are willing to correct their mistakes. It is usually easier to get them to correct a mistake if you are polite and not confrontational.
- **Show your appreciation.** If your news release is used by a news organization, you should thank them.

Sample news release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 5, 2006

Contact: Mary Smith, 555-555-5555, [jsmith@school.edu](mailto:jsmith@school.edu)

### **Final concert to highlight accomplishments of music students**

Everyone is invited to enjoy an evening of music performances as the Texas High School band, orchestra and choir present their final concert of the school year at 7 p.m. Friday (May 5<sup>th</sup>) in the high school auditorium.

The program will include (list highlights of the program).

The music program at Texas High School has grown to include more than 300 students this year, more than one-fourth of the student body.

“This concert is their opportunity to share with the community all that they have worked hard to accomplish this year,” said Mary Smith, high school music director.

“Our music program not only helps students develop their creativity and self-expression but also teaches them learning skills that help them be successful in other academic areas,” Smith said. She pointed out that more than half of the music students made the school honor roll during the year and music students who took the SAT test this year had an average score 110 points higher than the average for the entire high school.

“We continue to find new ways that music can be integrated into learning in other areas such as math, science and history,” she said.

Among the graduating seniors in the music program, 27 have already received college scholarship offers, Smith said. The college-bound seniors intend to pursue studies in a wide variety of areas including the fine arts, engineering, architecture, pre-med, communications and business.

Smith encouraged students who will enter high school as freshmen next year, and their parents, to contact her to learn more about the opportunities to be involved in music during their high school years.

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