

It's Your Move



by Karen Kneten

Anyone can say they support music education. In and of itself, being a music teacher communicates that you support music education. But beyond that, what more can you do, and how can you motivate others in your community to ensure all students continue to receive a standards-based, quality music education?

While budget battles will continue to be fought at the capitol, the war will be won in each of the 1,030 Texas school districts as individuals like you mobilize key community members through your parent support groups to speak out and demonstrate why music education in your school district is important to them.

Want Help?

We realize that going to the frontline might seem daunting, especially if you're new to the profession or haven't to this point ever had to fight for your music program. We also realize that no

With local administrators scrutinizing school spending in response to the state's budget crisis, now is the time to do your part in advocating for music education.

two school districts are the same. And while it would be ineffective to provide every music teacher the exact same script to read at the next school board or parent group meeting, we do want to equip you with tools that you can assimilate given your specific situation. We want to make it as easy as we can for you to be an advocate for music education and to provide your local decision makers the information they need to support your programs.

Get Organized

Whether you already have an active parent booster group or not, your students' parents are likely the group with whom you should begin working. They directly witness the positive effects of music in the curriculum and realize what it means to their children to receive a quality music education. They also have connections. And connections will make a difference. If you haven't already done this, take time to get to know the abilities and connections within your parent group:

- Who has the best access to civic and community groups?
- Who has the best access to the media?
- Who can best make connections with school officials? Who can do this diplomatically to the best advantage of the effort?
- Who can most easily identify, monitor, and call on legislators, school board members, or other decision makers for your school system?
- Who is interested in monitoring the school budget, giving your music education advocacy group guidance and input that can augment your actions?

Establish Your Priorities

With the fallout from the state's budget shortfall, it's likely that local funding of music education and jobs will be at the top of your priority list. However, the specifics may vary from district to district. Whatever they are, it is important to document your priorities to ensure that every communication you make to your local decision makers in some way supports those priorities.

Define Your Message

With a clearly defined message, you can evaluate every action or communication in your plan to ensure that it supports this message in some way. While your communication methods may vary, the core message itself should be constant. With the focus on budget cuts in this current legislative session, the message TMEA leaders center on is how music education is curricular and that it should not take a disproportionate share of cuts compared to other academic subjects. This is certainly an appropriate message for advocates at the local level as well.

Create Your Advocacy Approach

Evaluate the avenues of communication you have that will support the priorities you established, and create a time line for executing your advocacy strategy. Always focus communication on how music education benefits every student and, where possible, get parents and community leaders to champion the cause. It is important that you support music education; however, it will be more effective for members of the community to speak out on why it must be a vital part of every student's education. The following are a few ideas about how to be an advocate for music education. When you meet with your parent groups, think of other ways that will be effective in your district.

- Invite administrators and school board members to your rehearsals/classroom to observe.
- Include administrators in your next program (perform a piece with narration to include them).
- Get administrators to present awards to your students during your awards ceremony.

- Communicate your program's successes with local media.
- Have parents/community members submit letters to the editor supporting music education in the schools.
- Include advocacy material in your concert program, on your program's website, and within any regular communications you have with parents.
- Have parents send letters to school board members explaining why they should support music education in the schools. (Sample letters are available on the SupportMusic site linked from the TMEA advocacy materials page.)
- Have parents attend school board meetings and speak to the importance of music education for all students.

Advocacy Materials Await

The TMEA website includes several print-ready items and videos for your use in local advocacy. Additionally, the site links to the NAMM Support Music site that includes a wealth of advocacy material and thorough instructions for starting a grassroots advocacy effort.

Download the following print-ready materials and more for use in your advocacy efforts from www.tmea.org/resources/advocacy/materials:

Learning, Arts, and the Brain: Summary of the 2008 Dana Consortium report on the influence of arts study on cognition. The results from this consortium represented groundbreaking research solidifying the correlation of arts study and higher cognition and laid the foundation for further establishing a causal relationship.

What to Do Now

1. Go to www.tmea.org/resources/advocacy/materials.
2. Review the Take Action page of the Support Music website (linked on our advocacy materials page) as you develop an action plan.
3. Review the materials on the Support Music Community Action Kit and their Resources page (linked from our advocacy page).
4. Review the print-ready materials on the TMEA Advocacy Materials for Distribution page to know what is available for your use. Download these files to distribute them electronically or in print.
5. Schedule a meeting with your parent group (or start a group if you don't have one) to get them involved and leading a community advocacy strategy.
6. Register your support on GoArts.org and encourage your colleagues and your students' parents to do the same. Download print- and web-ready materials to support GoArts.org (sample printed below).

If you don't find what you need, contact the TMEA office and ask for help.

requirements in education code and this is an impressive document to share.

Show Them

While advocates should express what is important in their own words, sometimes hearing from an expert can be equally effective. With the current economic focus, Dan Pink's keynote address from our 2009 convention and his speech at the 2009 Texas Senate/House briefing offer the right message for the time (videos linked from the advocacy materials webpage). Even if you don't show the videos, take a few minutes to watch them as they will help you craft your message about the importance of music education.

Perform

Remember that high-quality performances by your groups can offer the best possible advocacy. Even if you can't coordinate the performance of your entire ensemble for several community organizations, work with small ensembles to have them represent your program. Contact local community groups (maybe your students' parents are already members) and ask if they would appreciate having a student group perform before the start of their meeting. The State Board of Education frequently begins its meeting with a performance by a Texas school music group. These performances consistently remind this Board about the effects of quality music instruction happening in the state as a direct result of the rules they influence. Certainly the same can be true at the local level.

Creativity in 21st Century Workforce

Preparation: Summary of the 2009 joint Senate/House chamber briefing led by Dan Pink on the importance of arts education for preparing students to enter the 21st-century workforce. The video of this briefing is also available on that webpage.

Hearing the Music, Honing the Mind:

This November 2010 *Scientific American* editorial offers information on how music instruction enhances the general ability to learn, and it makes a direct plea to preserve music education in the schools.

Reverse Economics: This case study reveals how instead of saving money, eliminating music instructor positions can actually raise the FTE costs for some school districts.

Voices in the Arts: This 2010 publication by the College Board offers a variety

of perspectives on the importance of arts in education. The College Board is a well-respected authority on college readiness.

Five-Year SAT Comparison: This graph shows that Texas All-State students have scored 20% higher than the national average and 22% higher than the Texas state average on the SAT.

Fine Arts Study and SAT Scores: College Board data show that college-bound seniors who study fine arts score 11–13% higher on the SAT than students not enrolled in fine arts courses.

What the Law Says: As you advocate, it is important that you know what is required by law. Fine arts education has a strong presence in State Board rule and law from the elementary through high school levels. It's possible that some local decision makers aren't aware of the

Comment on this article:
tmea.org/features



GoArts.org

Because every Texas student
deserves a quality fine arts education