

School Board: GET THE MESSAGE!

School boards are very important to maintaining the long-term health of a music program for one simple reason: they control the purse strings and have the last word on funding for schools in their districts. Convince them that music education is as important to the academic development of the nation's children as any other subject, and your students will never experience the loss of what is often the part of the school day they look forward to most.

Messaging

What's the key to securing their support? They're under a lot of pressure to make sure the books balance every fiscal year. With more time and resources being devoted to science and math, they're often likely to look to other subjects if hard financial choices have to be made. The answer is a compelling message.

Start by answering this question. What issues are important to them and will serve to persuade them that music education programs are an essential part of any curriculum?

- Schools with music programs have significantly higher attendance rates than those without programs (93.3% as compared to 84.9%).
- Schools with music programs have significantly higher graduation rates than those without programs (90.2% as compared to 72.9%).
- Students who take music classes tend to have fewer drug and alcohol problems and fewer brushes with the law.
- On average, music students score higher on both the verbal and math portions of the SAT, helping them to get into good colleges and universities.
- Music education helps in the development of 21st-century skills that employers prize, including
 - 1) critical thinking and problem solving
 - 2) collaboration
 - 3) creativity
 - 4) initiative and self-direction
 - 5) leadership and responsibility



What's the best way to cultivate a good relationship with your local school board?

- Invite school board members to all your concerts. Make them feel welcome, and they will be much less inclined to cut your program.
- Schedule a performance by your students at all school board meetings. If board members see the results of your teaching for themselves, it will be much harder for them to make cuts to your program.
- Ask your principal to speak on the program's behalf at school board meetings. A principal's words can carry a lot of weight in these settings.
- Make sure you have relevant research and hard data on things like student test scores and budget figures on hand anytime you speak at school board meetings.
- And have your students' parents talk about the benefits of music education in their children's lives at school board meetings. A good anecdote is often more effective than a PowerPoint presentation full of statistical information.

The Bottom Line

Today's music educator is faced with a difficult choice. Either actively advocate on behalf of your own program or have it run the risk of falling victim to budget cuts when it comes time for school districts to make tough funding decisions. Protect your program and your students' access to a comprehensive education that includes music education provided by exemplary music educators. Their futures may depend on it.

Questions?

Write to advocacy@nafme2.org or call (800) 336-3768.

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