

To be the best advocate, be the best teacher!

I hope everyone enjoyed the 77th Annual MMEA In-Service! The performing ensembles were outstanding; every clinic session that I observed had great attendance and seemed to be engaging and informative; meetings were well attended; mentors were acknowledged; and new teachers made some important connections. It was our goal to raise the awareness of the benefits of an active and ongoing mentoring program for young music educators. If we lose our drive and desire to reach out to the young music educator over the next months and years then the 77th In-Service will not have served its purpose. Just as advocacy is an ongoing mission so is mentoring. MMEA will continue to develop its mentoring program. Many ideas and comments were shared to make our mentoring program a successful venture. A huge thank you to all of the Vice-Presidents and members of the Advisory Board for all of their work in preparing and presenting this year's conference.

What a thrill it was to have Dr. Glenn Nierman, President of NAFME, attend our conference. As part of Thursday's first general session Dr. Nierman shared the ongoing work of the national association in curriculum and assessment development and the continued work on publications to help with teacher evaluation. We are fortunate to have forward looking individuals as Dr. Nierman leading our association.

Maestro Steven Jarvi, was inspirational, engaging and humorous. I now know why my students who are members of the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra love him so. Within seconds of first meeting him he makes you feel as if you have been friends forever. A truly gifted conductor and wonderful mentor.

I am so very grateful that Dr. Lenz was able to attend our conference. We are very fortunate to have Dr. Victor Lenz as an advocate for music education. As you heard from his comments on Saturday afternoon he understands the benefits of music education for students and he readily endorses music and art as a vital part of the curriculum for our schools. Dr. Lenz is an active advocate on the State Board of Education. We must acknowledge his call to action and do our part to be a daily advocate in our school and community.

I am completely impressed and encouraged with our new Arts Education Director Tom Tobias. Mr. Tobias attended two days of our conference to sit in on meetings of SMTE as they discussed the concerns and potential problems that we are facing with teacher certification criteria. His commitment to this new position is inspiring. I look forward to working with Mr. Tobias as we continue to build on this positive relationship.

The theme of this issue is advocacy. A very timely focus as we recognize the 30th anniversary of Music In Our Schools Month (MIOSM). Just having to think and worry about defending something so valuable to every child can make us feel helpless and indignant in the same breath. The reality of the world we live in is that the value of music education in our schools is no longer apparent to many outside of our programs. It therefore becomes our responsibility to educate and advocate for the value of the arts as part of the core curriculum at every opportunity we have.

Advocacy should not be thought of as a conversation that takes place when something is wrong or when a program is in danger of being eliminated. Advocacy should be an ongoing position for everyone and is all about spreading the good news on the benefits of music and arts education for all children. We must be proactive when thinking about ways to advocate for music and the arts.

We must guard against complacency when considering advocacy. It is easy to feel helpless because of the bureaucratic processes and rhetoric. We may also assume a position of denial out of allegiance and support for our school and administration. Apathy can set in because we assume there is security due to seniority and a relative good feeling within your community about the arts. These assumptions can lead to disappointing circumstances. As musicians and dedicated educators we tend to set advocacy aside for performance preparation and the myriad of task that overwhelm our daily schedule. Each of us needs an advocacy agenda that is ongoing and dedicated to maintaining a presence in our schools and communities.

Advocacy has many faces and can assume varied forms of activities and processes. Comprehensive teaching, connecting the music we are performing with other curricular subjects helps those that do not understand what we do see that music speaks to all academic areas and enhances learning. This cross curricular integration should be extended to your audience by relaying historical and interesting information about music being performed.

Public relations is advocacy! Market your program at every opportunity. Consider forming a music coalition in your community. This should include parents, community members, music store owners, local arts organizations. This is your team of allies that will create ideas for marketing and help spread the good word of arts education.

Stay active in your community and support civic functions. Be careful of the time that you ask of your students. We must remember they have other commitments as well as our programs.

Develop a three minute elevator speech that documents the inherent benefits of music education. When the opportunity reveals itself you are ready to deliver.

Remember that the basis of all advocacy efforts must always be student centered.

I was honored to be a part of the Four Rivers Conference Band in January. A new concept for me and an idea that I hope others will consider is the concert format of this ensemble. This conference band performs for the student body in two of the many schools of this conference on a rotating basis. These concerts were fun! The student body was so very respectful and attentive. They enjoyed watching their peers perform. This is wonderful means of advocacy. Bravo to the directors of the conference for such a wonderful idea.

Nearly thirty year ago Howard Gardner, from Harvard University, claimed music is a unique intelligence and cognitive process. Rather than spending so much energy arguing that music

helps other academic subjects, I believe we should devote more time to demonstrating that music is a unique way of experiencing the world, a unique aspect of the human existence and a unique mode of self-expression. NAFME's Broader Minded "Think Beyond the Bubble" advocacy program addresses this position very well.

Understanding that music is a distinct cognitive process, we should focus on continuing to improve the music experience for our students. If our programs provide an outstanding musical experience that is broad-based, relevant, and inclusive, we become proactive in our advocacy rather than reactive. In short, to be the best advocate, be the best teacher!(Benham)

March 12, 2015 is MMEA Music Advocacy Day in Jefferson City. I hope many of you will be able to join me as we visit with policy makers to continue to spread the good news about music education. I will send additional information as the date draws near.

Best wishes for the remainder of the school year. Please contact me if I can be of service to you or your program.

Benham, John L., (2011). *Music Advocacy: moving from survival to vision*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.