

# Music Advocacy

My inspiration for this article came after reading NAFME President, Nancy Ditmer's article in the latest issue of MEJ, "One Message-Many Voices." (MEJ, March 2013, Vol. 99) I hope that everyone will take the time to read her dedicated words. Each of us must be ever vigilant advocates for the arts in our schools. While attending the National Assembly meeting in Baltimore last summer we were all introduced to the messaging strategy developed by NAFME titled "Music Education – Orchestrating Success!" It consists of some universal speaking points that we are encouraged to use when speaking in support of Music Education. I will post these speaking points with some ideas to the MMEA web site. Nancy's message is that we should share our belief in the value of music study for every student via content that is consistent and repeatable without being redundant.

An advocate is someone who speaks or writes in support of a cause, argument or proposal. Advocacy then is the work of an advocate. It is the action plan of those who argue for and make recommendations for continued support of an idea or plan. My college curriculum did not include a class on advocacy methods or techniques, but speaking in support of music is not difficult for us. Because of the innumerable tasks that we oversee advocacy is often left for later or when there is less to do. Plus it is difficult to develop and maintain an advocacy agenda.

It seems unfair at times that the music program appears to be involved in advocacy far more than other academic programs, but it remains necessary. Advocacy aids the promotion of the school music program, and encourages active support from parents, administrators, community members, and government officials.

It is too late to advocate for a program when it is in trouble. Music advocacy should become a regular ingredient of the music program for reasons that supersede financial support, but rather reflect the inherent character building and creative shaping of the individual. We should view advocacy as a synthesized part of the musical climate and an ongoing commitment to share the value of music for every child.

The use of media, ie; newspapers, radio, television, for advocacy is troublesome at best. The media is good at distorting or side stepping our message and focusing on a gimmick or aspect they feel is of more interest. My latest battle with public radio and MIOSM was so disappointing. At the same time there are materials and media available that should be used with caution. You can find numerous instances of support for Music Education on Youtube etc., many are very good and some are suspect. I am not convinced that all of the statements by rock or pop musicians are necessarily good and send the best message. These suspect messages can be harmful and distract from the true message of Music Education. The best form of communication for support of our art is personal messaging.

Let's not forget that action can speak louder than words. Demonstrations of positive involvement and the willingness to act as an integral part of the school and community can mean as much as dialogue. Be a team player with your administration. Be flexible in support of the academic priorities. Be supportive and participate in community and civic functions. When we

isolate ourselves and expect special considerations or treatment we lose the support we need. A successful and active music program often advocates for itself simply by image alone.

Advocacy is often aimed at the wrong audience. Be careful not to preach to the choir. The target audience that needs convincing is most often the individuals and organizations that have never been involved in music. They are unaware of the positive aspects and benefit to education.

Please visit the MMEA web site for a reprint of an article by Gloria J. Kiester, "*Teaching music: for 'feelingful' intelligence.*" She says it so well: "Music is creative energy captured in sound. It heightens feeling by saying what words cannot express. It is essentially ineffable. Music is "feelingful" intelligence. It is holistic thinking with a punch. No other part of the curriculum can duplicate this unique and powerful way of knowing. In daily life we do not choose to think now in facts and later in feelings. We use both, inextricably combined, in order to comprehend. One without the other would be unthinkable." This entire essay is wonderful and I encourage you to read it.

While attending the Midwest Band and Orchestra Conference this past December I had an agenda for the display area. I was determined to meet with Dan McCaffrey to finalize any loose ends concerning their sponsorship of the Salon A stage. Then I made sure that I spoke with several other manufacturers to solicit interest for sponsorship in the future. As I made the rounds to other vendors with MMEA ties or interest I ran across the NAMM booth. I had recently spoken with Sharon Bryant a representative at NAMM to enroll MMEA as an affiliate member in support of SupportMusic.com. When you visit the MMEA home page you will see the SupportMusic.com icon. If you click on the icon you will enter their web site. There you will find many resource materials and ideas.

SupportMusic.com is a public service initiative that intends to critically impact and support music education in local communities around the United States. SupportMusic.com is an advocacy effort that unites various national and regional organizations with parents and community leaders seeking to improve access and opportunity in music and arts learning. Tens of thousands of concerned citizens visit the website every month and use its resources to keep music education strong in their schools and communities.

Sharon was not at the Midwest Conference but I spoke with a John Benham. John was cleaning up the booth for the day and he was packing some books. I picked up one of the books, "*Music Advocacy, Moving from Survival to Vision*" by John Benham. I began asking him about the book and he was a little disappointed that I did not already know about his book or his work. I am used to people being disappointed with me so it was easy to stay focused. He reluctantly gave me a brief synopsis and then feeling guilty I bought his book. He stuck the \$20 in his front pants pocket and continued to collect his belongings and I turned and walked away somewhat embarrassed. For all I know he may not have been John Benham but whoever he was he shamed me into purchasing what has turned out to be a great book. I did not open the book until after the MMEA conference. Now I am very happy that I stumbled on to the NAMM display and that guy that convinced me to buy this book. This is an action document, a "how to" book that every music educator should be aware of and every school music department should own. It is filled with practical step by step advice and proven procedures for saving and building music programs. The book is a collection of thirty years of work and experience in dealing with and

understanding the processes of dealing with administrators and communities and saving music programs. I will admit that I have not finished the book. Every time I pick it up this image of John Benham frowning at me from the other side of a table in Chicago is very real. But I am determined to finish it before I return to Midwest and have to face him again. It really is an excellent resource and a good \$20 investment. I have posted a summary of ideas from Benham's book at our web site.

Another terrific book that should be in everyone's personal library is "*Music Advocacy and Student Leadership, Key Components for Every Successful Music Program*," by Tim Lautzenheiser (GIA Publications). Packed full of quotes and inspirational advice for advocacy.

A very positive addition at the national level is the NAFME Music Policy Roundtable, an alliance of music advocacy organizations formalized by the National Association for Music Education and American String Teachers Association. It is recognized publicly under the stated name of "The Music Education Policy Roundtable." This organization is dedicated to ensuring the presence and perseverance of school music programs taught by certified music educators teaching sequential, standards-based music education to students across the nation. This group is doing tremendous work on our behalf at the national level by making a positive case for music education with government officials in Washington D.C. By means of Groundswell I enjoy following their agendas with congressmen and discussions on proposed bills that might have an impact on education. You can reference Groundswell at the NAFME site.

I encourage you to visit the MMEA web site, [www.mmea.net](http://www.mmea.net) for advocacy resources and informative articles/essays. It is our goal to make this web site a resource for all Music Educators. I will be posting on a regular basis to the Advocacy pages. Please visit the web site for a listing of some advocacy resources. I encourage you to contact me with additional sources or articles/essays that you would like to see posted to our web site to share with other members. At the NAFME web site there are many tools and ideas, [www.nafme.org](http://www.nafme.org), (click "For Advocates" on the top banner).

Each of us needs to develop an active agenda for music advocacy. Nancy Dittmer's "...Many Voices!" is you and me! We need to accept the challenge and spread the good word. Perhaps music advocacy is not "what we do" but instead it is "who we are." We understand the value of music and we know music is an essential element of humankind. We need to join our voices and tell the story to any and all that will listen. Make advocacy a regular part of your daily life and mission.

Benham, John L., *Music Advocacy, Moving from Survival to Vision*. Rowan & Littlefield Pub., Inc., 2011.

Kiester, Gloria J., *Teaching music: for 'feelingful' intelligence*. Star Tribune, Minneapolis.

Lautzenheiser, Tim, *Music Advocacy and Student Leadership*. GIA Pub. 2005.