

Friendly Parents Guide for Advocating on Behalf of Your Student's Musical Education

Purpose:

In order to be an effective advocate you need to make sure that your purpose is clear. The current situation within our State is a disaster for Funding of Education, which translates into fewer dollars for K-12 Education, and increased odds that Schools will have to cut Athletics, Extra-Curricular Activities, and Co-Curricular programs that are not on the MME/MEAP. This translates into reductions in music staffing, music budgets, parts of programs (grade levels of teaching within the program combined or eliminated), and/or entire music programs eliminated from K-12 districts due to a lack of funding.

Not every school district will reduce their size and programs in the same manner, but ALL will have to cut with the proposed reductions for this year, AND EVEN WORSE, what lays ahead in 2010-11. The purpose of your advocacy needs to direct the "decision makers" that are controlling the dollars, as well as your child's future, into making informed decisions that will affect the quality of your child's education in the most POSITIVE way.

Each contact that you make needs to have the above purpose, and you need to have frequent, documented conversations with these leaders and other contacts that you may have such as parents, educators, and friends that would be willing to make the same contacts. Being heard as an independent voice is important, but frequent, multiple contacts will make a more effective difference and impact.

Identify the "Decision Makers":

In every community the "Decision Makers" share similarities and also have their differences. I have found that there is a 3-point Decision Making Structure that is constant within each district within our State. Those that control or influence the spending are the valuable Decision Makers.

1. **Administrators:** Although in many ways, their hands are tied, administrators will have to inevitably make the recommendations to the School Board on how the curriculum will be delivered, the programs will be staffed, and the money will be spent. A large portion of a school's budget is spent on their staff, so it is fair to say that the ones that have contact with your students are the most valuable resource. It is also fair to say that this area will see trimming which will affect your student in class size increases, program reductions and more. It is up to you to positively advocate for your child's education with these very important decision makers. They need to hear frequently the benefits that your child has gained and how important it is to you that they continue to keep their programs strong. With Schools of Choice bringing additional funding to the schools, you may also find that it is important for your area school to run a full compliment of programs well, as to attract area students whose home districts have failed to run programs that will benefit their students.
2. **School Board Members:** Any recommendations on budgets, staffing, etc. from administration must be adopted by the School Board. These members are elected and are a representation of your community. These members need to have similar communications from you and your circle of interested parties that these programs that your student is a part of are invaluable and are a non-negotiable part of your school district's identity. These members are the final stop in policy/recommendations before they are denied or adopted.

3. **Legislature:** These leaders, regardless of partisanship, are invaluable to the state of K-12 Education, as they will inevitably have to decide how much money will be spent on K-12 Education, when it will be spent, and in many instances how it will be spent. There are many facets of government that come together to adopt a budget for anything but some key "Decision Makers" that you and your circle will need to communicate regularly with are:
- a. Governor's Office: Governor Rick Snyder P.O. BOX 30013 Lansing, MI 48909
Tx: 517-373-3400 Email: Rick.Snyder@michigan.gov
Website: <http://www.michigan.gov/snyder>
 - b. Senate Majority Leader: Senator Randy Richardville P.O. BOX 30036 Lansing, MI 48909-7536
Tx: 517-373-3543 Email: SenRichardville@senate.michigan.gov
 - c. House Speaker: Speaker Jase Bolger P.O. Box 30014 Lansing, MI 48909-7514
Tx: 517-373-1787 Email: JaseBolger@house.mi.gov
 - d. Your Local Representative and Senator: To find them,
<http://www.educationreport.org/article.aspx?ID=9313>
 - e. Clerk for the House Education Committee: Committee Clerk: Ben Cook Ph: 517.373.2002
bcook@house.mi.gov
 - f. Clerk for the Senate Education Committee: Clerk: Leta Howard, 1005 Farnum Bldg.
Phone: (517) 373-5314
 - g. Others of influence: Business Leaders, Education Leaders (Higher Education Deans, Department Chairs)...remember these areas will suffer when K-12 Education is cut and programs are eliminated.

Communicate Frequently to All: Be an ambassador of communication regarding this important issue. Make sure that beside of all of the "Decision Makers" that you are soliciting your contacts assistance, as this needs to be a grass-roots effort. All communications need to be documented, purposeful and well-informed. It is important to have frequent communications with these folks, and hold them accountable for their decisions. They hold the purse strings to the funding of your students' future and experience in K-12 Education. Keep informed through monitoring websites, local media and more. Most importantly, keep positive, keep informed and keep communicating.

For ideas on what to propose as solutions, or at least examine the problem, see our State Superintendent Mike Flanagan's Pod-Cast "The Next Step" at: <http://mistreamnet.com/videtail.php?who=mike110409>

The arts and K-12 Education have been partnered for a long time, and music has been a pillar of foundation discussed as far back as Plato, however, these times have presented new challenges that will determine what we are made of for the next many years. Advocate for what you think is right, and become involved in the process that may very well keep music on the right beat in our schools.