

Foreword

The focus on Advocacy in this month's issue is an important one. In the following article, Jay Welenc provides a viewpoint gained from experience, but one which many neglect to see. It applies to ALL aspects of music programs, not just Jazz. Why does it appear in the JECO column? JECO's mission is to help you make Jazz a part of your curriculum in any way that we can. Our shared collective wisdom will help us all.

With that goal in mind, our first summer meeting focused on further developing our web site. We see it as the primary way to help *anybody* connect to Jazz. We will let you know when the first installment of our new effort is available. In the meantime, you can view helpful links concerning Jazz by going to <http://www.jecohio.org/>.

Jeffrey D. Boehm, Ph.D. - JECO President

An Ugly Truth About Music Advocacy

Jay Welenc

At a private school in an inner-city neighborhood, the Band Director and the Business Manager were locked in a contest of wills. The Business Manager claimed that the school was struggling to maintain solvency, yet found extra cash when someone asked, provided that someone was outside the Music Dept. The band director was struggling to build his program. A good band program, could attract smart, artistically-minded students from across the area. The Manager said the pitiful sum in the music budget was what was available.

At a public school, the administration wanted to cut the Music department budget. The department faculty was instructed to determine the items they wanted cut. If they refused, the cuts would be arbitrarily made by the administration, and could be devastating. It was tempting for the faculty to try to minimize the damage by agreeing to make such a list, but they felt that if they did so, they would be saying that those items were not important to the program.

In another school, the Athletic Director decided to impose athletic-eligibility requirements on music students. Because the Marching Band auditioned Flag Corps members from outside of the Band classes, and the Flag Corps rehearsed after school, he thought this was justifiable.

Elsewhere, a Jazz Program was not allowed into the Band curriculum. Faculty were told to teach jazz band during the "regular band" class.

Music educators are familiar with the advocacy struggles in music education. The Music Educators National Conference has put the issue in the national spotlight, and the Ohio Music Educators Association has been active and visible in the arena for a while. Dr. Tim

Lautzenheiser traveled to every state presenting teacher workshops and music advocacy sessions for parents and community leaders. The message has been around for decades, yet cuts to music programs continue. Why is advocacy still necessary?

While state and national advocacy efforts is crucial to music programs in schools, the essential struggles are decided locally. Many times, however, music advocacy at the local level fails. After observing other struggles like those described above, I noticed a disturbing pattern: the use of logic and reason in detailing the benefit to students had no effect on administrators. Similarly, I rarely won arguments based on the merits of my case, or by explaining the effects policies would have on my students. I came to realize that this was because the decision-makers had hidden agendas. These agendas had nothing to do with my students, their education, or the curriculum.

Music advocates generally make one of two arguments for music education. The first is the “music for its own sake” argument. This argument says that music is part of a basic education, is part of every culture around the world, and is worthy of serious study. What is not generally mentioned, is that music is a multi-billion dollar industry, and arts and entertainment dollars are a major source of revenue in many communities.

The second argument I call the “helping” argument. This argument shows that music is good for things other people value instead of music. It says that studying music helps students to learn other academic subjects, it raises test scores, and enhances students’ reasoning, thinking, and teamwork. While the logic of these arguments rings true, their message is ignored by decision-makers.

To prevail in the local advocacy struggle, one must discover the hidden agendas that are at work, and find effective ways to address them. The directors in the previous stories discovered the following techniques:

The Band Director at the private school had a chat with the Business Manager, who revealed that he had often felt disrespected by staff members, including the Band Director. The Director then adopted a less adversarial attitude. The relationship was altered, and the purse strings loosened for the Music Department.

At the public school where faculty were told to decide cuts, music teachers enlisted a school board member (friendly to the music program) to advocate for them. The cuts were small; the program and faculty positions remained intact.

The Athletic Director was stopped by the Fine Arts Supervisor. The Supervisor pointed out that the suggestions would require a change in board policy. The matter was dropped.

The Jazz Program became a “Jazz Lab” section attached to the “regular band” class. Extra rehearsal time was made available for the lab section, students received an honors credit for Band. This program grew into three jazz ensembles.

None of these conflicts was resolved because someone changed their mind about music, or because of logic. They were resolved through communication with the appropriate people.

How can music educators find out what is really behind the resistance they face?

Find out who is the decision-maker and what is important to them. Sometimes when administrators disagree, the conflict is really about power. Power can be wielded to influence the administrative hierarchy by community members; parents, board members, donors, and politicians all have significant sway over some school leaders. Enlist them as advocates for your program or ideas.

Become familiar with the language used by administrators and politicians; using their “buzzwords” ensures that all parties are speaking the same language. Discover what staffing and budgetary responsibilities administrators and board members have, so that you can move toward a compromise that addresses everyone’s needs. You can consult official documents, if you believe that the act of asking for this information in person could be misinterpreted. It may be helpful to consult those who have this knowledge, but are outside the system; be careful not to draw them in also.

Most importantly, you must have a remedy for the problems caused by the hidden agenda; otherwise you are not likely to prevail. Inventive solutions, such as those above, can sometimes offer an “out” for a decision-maker who cannot appear to “give in”. Speaking the language of educational officials shows them that you understand the process; sometimes utilizing bureaucratic details will work in your favor. Understanding what the other person desires can open doors. A positive relationship with decision-makers can be your best defense when all else fails.

Educators may believe that these tactics are “too political,” and that using them means taking the “low road.” Taking the “high road” first in my career challenges led me to learn that those I was engaging were not “there”. To advocate for my program and my students, I had to deal with issues that had nothing to do with music or education. That is an ugly truth about music advocacy.

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