



NYSSMA
NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL MUSIC ASSOCIATION

NYSSMA

Advocacy Handbook

For Parents

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INTRODUCTION

The future of music education in the state of New York is dependent upon the support of educators, parents, students, communities, legislators and support groups. The New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) provides this *Advocacy Handbook for Parents* to aid in supporting music education advocacy efforts at the local level. NYSSMA believes that every student deserves the right to receive a well-rounded education that includes a comprehensive, sequential, high-quality program of music taught by a qualified music educator. We believe parents must be a strong partner in our efforts.

“Public relations involves more than publicizing one event; the latter is promotion. Instead, we must be concerned with an ongoing public relations effort. Our PR work must be continuous, and it must reach further than promotion for a single event.” Neiman and Thoms (1992)

In a statement to school administrators in August, 2009, Arne Duncan, United States Secretary of Education said, “At a time when critical and far-reaching budget and program decisions are being made, I bring to your attention the importance of the arts as a core academic subject and part of a complete education for all students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) defines the arts as a core subject, and the arts play a significant role in children’s development and learning process. The arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem solver who are confident and able to think creatively. These qualities can be especially important in improving learning among students from economically disadvantaged circumstances”

WHAT YOU MUST HAVE TO ADVOCATE FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

An advocate for music education enjoys music, studies music, is informed about music, and supports music education in a variety of ways. Following are some suggestions for becoming an effective advocate for music education:

A Message. Know what you want to accomplish. Make your message clear and direct. Align your message with other music and arts education advocates in your local area, region and within NYSSMA. Develop a plan to accomplish your goals.

Information or Supporting Facts. Know the background information and the impact of your message. Use advocacy tips from NYSSMA, The National Association for Music Education, the Support Music Coalition, VH-1 Save the Music, Americans for the Arts and more to stay informed. Use facts and local success stories to support your message.

Knowledge of Your Audiences. Know who you're targeting and how to tailor your message to each group. Create opportunities by networking and meeting with policy makers (administrators, school board members, elected officials on the local and state levels) to implement your plan.

Persistence Don't give up! Advocacy is an on-going process. There will be setbacks, but the players are always changing. Every day presents new opportunities. NYSSMA can provide data and information to support your local advocacy efforts.

MARKETING THE MUSIC PROGRAM

Public relations involves more than publicizing one event. We must be concerned with ongoing advocacy efforts. Public Relations and Advocacy must be continuous, and it must reach further than promotion for a single event.

By continuously marketing the music program, one takes a proactive approach to reflect the positive benefits derived by students in a quality music program. By being proactive, music administrators and music educators are able to revel in pride of their programs. As the media report on a district's music activities, students, parents, administrators, and other members of the school community share in the pride. "As educators, we know that this shared pride can be a critically important factor in determining the extent of our programs' success" (Neiman & Thoms, 1992, p. 2).

In the uncertain world of school finance and competition for funds and the time and attention of students, the need to build community support must be paramount.

"A proactive, rather than a reactive new report from the school setting is needed to take the lead in communicating effectively in a quality public relations program...[if none exists] there might be tremendous distortions of what a school is doing and what goals are being accomplished" (Ediger, 2001, p. 743).

While an extensive background in public relations is not required, a good sense of organization is. Well-planned advocacy can help ensure that the important work of music education continues.

The essence of good public relations depends upon sound, thoughtful, and respectful communication – and this is the key to garnering support for an ensuring survival of music programs: working with a teacher struggling to meet the needs of her diverse student population; encouraging parents to become involved; creating "learning" statements to accompany artwork displays, music programs, or verbal announcements at concerts; quick, efficient customer service to the community – parents, teachers, and business leaders; and, most importantly, sharing a personal belief in and passion for music in the lives of children. (Hansen, pp. 35-36)

TARGET AUDIENCES

A target audience is defined as a group of individuals with common interests or characteristics to whom you are trying to reach with your specific messages about music education. Target audiences may be classified into primary groups, such as parents, board of education members, district administrators, business owners, community leaders and the media. Your media relations activities should contain a timely mix of information to reach each group.

Parents – We “preach to the choir” when we send our messages to the parents of our student musicians. We must also reach out to local Parent-Teacher Associations as well. Music educators and music administrators should attend meetings, spreading good news and upcoming events to these constituents. Provide a calendar of activities/concerts/stage performances for their use.

Board of Education and District Administrators – Parents should partner with District administrators and members of boards of education to advocate for education in general; and for music and arts education specifically. Learn about the issues that pertain to your local school district and work together to have your messages heard. Artists and musicians produce TANGIBLE evidence of what goes on in their classrooms everyday. Work with your arts educators and school administrators to make sure Board members are invited to your events that include classroom lessons, in-school performances and stage productions.

Business Owners and Community Leaders – Develop and maintain a professional relationship with local business owners, civic leaders, senior citizen centers and public libraries. They should be invited to events as well.

New York State Legislators:

Times of crises should not be the only time you reach out to your government representatives. Members of your local town council, town supervisors, and county legislators should have a basic understanding of your music program and the events it sponsors throughout the year. This is developed over time with invitations to concerts, assemblies, marching band competitions, stage/drama productions, award ceremonies, etc. Your school district office will have information on your local representatives, but you may find out the names and contact information for your local State Senator and Assembly member by visiting the following websites and entering the zip code of your school district:

<http://www.assembly.state.ny.us/>

<http://www.senate.state.ny.us/senatehomepage.nsf/home?openform>

EXECUTION

Developing Lists and Contact Information:

A list of local businesses, neighbors and fellow advocates will be helpful as you “sell” your story. There are a number of ways to obtain contact information including names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

News Tip Idea Sheet:

Use the form on page 11 to help get your thoughts organized. It can act as a checklist as you prepare to disseminate information to the media.

As an interested party, be sure you can speak to issues related to your local program and assist your school staff in promoting the efforts of:

- Music & Art Department Events
- All County/All State Students
- Marching Band Championships
- Concerts
- Out-of-State Performances
- Art Exhibits

WHAT CAN WE DO TO GENERATE POSITIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS?

As parents, you are in a unique situation that enables students perform.

- If your school district employs an arts administrator, work closely with that person to promote events happening in your department and to obtain approvals from other District Administrators including possibly Public Relations specialist.
- Write an article for your local newspaper about the school’s department. Work with teachers to keep it centered around the curriculum and the successes of their students.
- Use observances like *Music In Our Schools Month*, *Jazz History Month* and *Women’s History Month* to assist music teachers in promoting how music is related to the curriculum.

Message Points

- NYSSMA, the New York State School Music Association, is the largest state affiliate of The National Association for Music Education, with approximately 6,000 proud members.
- The Mission of the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) is to advocate for and improve music education across New York State by promoting and producing appropriate activities and programs for its membership and students in member school music programs

- Each year, over 100,000 students participate in more than 130 adjudication festivals held around New York State
- The NYSSMA Winter Conference attracts almost 4,000 participants and offers about 190 workshops and showcases
- About 6,000 students audition for the 8 All-State performing groups, and just under 900 are selected to participate annually
- The School Music News is mailed to every NYSSMA member throughout the year and keeps everyone fully informed on issues pertaining to music education in New York State.
- The NYSSMA Manual is the definitive resource for setting standards and expectations for each instrument and voice part at every level
- With District approval, add this to your boilerplate statement: (Your School District) serves (xxx students) in (xxx) buildings. Approximately (xxxx) students are active in the music program in grades kindergarten through twelve. (xxxx) students earned a spot in the Top 10 of the Graduating Class of (insert year).

News Tip Idea Sheet

Who is Involved (Students, teachers, administrators, parents, members of Board of Education)?

Who is the Contact Person? (Include phone number, e-mail and cell phone number for on-site contact)

What is the Event?

Where will the Event be Located (School Building, District Office, Community Library)?

When will the Event take place (During the school day, After School, Weekend)?

Why are you holding the Event (Is it related to the Curriculum? Are you hosting an out-of-district artist or performer)?

Have approvals been obtained (Superintendent, Principal, Director)?

Are you taking photographs and have legal releases been obtained for use of minors in photographs?

Will supplementary materials be distributed at the Event?

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