

Advocacy

Making Your Program Vibrant and Relevant in the 21st Century

presented by:

David A. Kaufman

d.kaufman@wi.k12.ny.us

Survey Discussion

1. Why did you decide to become a music teacher?

Certainly, none of us became music teachers because of the high pay, long vacations, summers off, etc. We became music educators because of an intense passion to share what we know about music. We know it is special and beyond actual description. In fact, one basically has to be involved with it to truly understand its power. We work incredibly hard at what we do, are 110% invested in the success of all our students, and take tremendous pride in the product we produce. We don't consider what we do as a job, because the word "job" implies "work". It's hard to call what we do work, because we enjoy it so much.

2. What are aspects of your program that you are most proud of?

Ideally we are proud of all aspects of the program equally. If there is an area of the program that needs attention, then we as high quality teachers must address whatever the shortcoming is. All areas of the music program should shine, and we should not compete within the department unnecessarily. Every student participating at every level and activity in the program should feel as well taken care of as any other student.

3. Why is arts education an important part of a child's education?

Music participation provides a unique opportunity for literacy preparation. Whether the children are singing, playing, or listening, teachers direct them to listen and hear in new ways which exercises their aural discrimination. Playing instruments and adding movement to the lessons teaches children about sequential learning which is essential in reading comprehension.

Plato once said that music “is a more potent instrument than any other for education”. You will find many teachers of young children who would agree with him. Recent research has found that music uses both sides of the brain, a fact that makes it valuable in all areas of development. Music affects the growth of a child’s brain academically, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Music is academic. For some people, this is the primary reason for providing music lessons to their children. A recent study from the University of California found that music trains the brain for higher forms of thinking. Second graders who were given music lessons scored 27% higher on proportional math and fractions tests than children who received no special instruction. Research indicates that musical training permanently wires a young mind for enhanced performance.

Music is physical. Music can be described as a sport. Learning to sing and keep rhythm develops coordination. The air and wind power necessary to blow a flute, trumpet or saxophone promotes a healthy body.

Music is emotional. Music is an art form. We are emotional beings and every child requires an artistic outlet. Music may be your child’s vehicle of expression.

Music is for life. Most people can’t play soccer, or football at 70 or 80 years of age but they can sing. And they can play piano or some other instrument. Music is a gift you can give your child that will last their entire lives.

(from Music Education Onlinesm)

4. What things do you do specifically to **advocate** for your program?

Everything we do must advocate for our programs. Music programs are constantly under threat and therefore we must always be fighting for the program. We must justify everything we do. From the obligatory “thanks” we give parents, administrators and board members at our concerts, to the large-scale demonstrations we do to show the importance of music education, every little bit counts.

5. How would your students describe you?

Your students talk about you and the program more often than you might realize. Whether it is in their other classes, or at the dinner table, students will express their opinion of you in a starkly honest manner. You should be viewed as enthusiastic, knowledgeable, caring, and most importantly, fair.

6. How would your building faculty describe you?

The building faculty should regard you as a team player that is extremely hard working and professional. They should see you as an educator who is interested in the entire academic program. You should avoid being seen as the teacher who never seems to have anything to do expect wander the halls with a cup of coffee and a box of doughnuts. You should also avoid being viewed as the teacher who never has time for anything or anyone in the building community, emerging from your cave only to sign in and get your mail.

7. How do you feel the community would describe you?

Be mindful of crafting a reputation for yourself in the community that is both positive and professional. The community should view you as hard-working, highly qualified, and above all, caring of students.

8. How would you describe your relationship with building and district administrators?

It is critically important to have a highly professional and positive relationship with both building level and district level administrators. Because you are a music teacher, you are a public figure. Find ways to balance your aims of the music program with the inevitable things your administrators want you to do for public relations. Although the educational goals you set forth for your students must be paramount, you should find ways to help out the administration. The favors will hopefully not be soon forgotten.

9. Do you collaborate with teachers in other disciplines? If so, when was the last time?
Please describe the collaboration.

Collaboration with teachers in other disciplines can be an incredibly powerful tool for developing in your colleagues a better understanding and appreciation for the arts. Whether it be with your class, club, honor society, or a group created just for the event, working with others is a great way to make allies in an increasingly difficult educational environment. These allies in turn become advocates for the program, promoting the importance of the creative arts, the importance of pull-out lessons, etc.

10. Are you a member of your professional advocacy organization (SCMEA, NYSSMA, NAFME, etc.)?

One of the most important things we can do as educators is to become a member of the professional organizations that support music in our schools. From SCMEA at the local level, NYSSMA at the state level, and NAFME at the national level, these organizations advocate for music in our schools to the community-at-large and also engage in direct advocacy and/or lobbying efforts with our elected leaders. These organizations have the know-how and numbers to make a difference when it comes to the legislative process. These organizations also offer incredible enrichment opportunities for our students, including special “Day Of” events, classroom music workshops for adults and students, and of course the All-County, All-State, and All-Eastern Music Festivals for our students. These professional organizations cannot exist without our membership and involvement.

11. Are you well-versed in your collectively bargained contract? Are you involved with your union?

Every teacher should know their contract language. Period. If possible, involve yourself with the operations of the union. If being a building delegate seems like too much of a commitment, then consider joining a committee or finding some other way to help out. Not only does the union leadership always need the help of the membership, but your involvement is a great way to build an important bridge. What will your leadership be fighting for at the bargaining table at the next round of negotiations. Make sure they know you are a team player who is fighting for public education in general, not just your own program. In turn, they will fight for your program.

12. Would you consider yourself an informed voter?

13. Do you keep abreast of political issues that affect education? Do you vote in local, state, and national elections?

There is a difference between simply being a voter and being an informed voter. An often overlooked part of advocacy on the part of the teacher is keeping abreast with political issues that have an impact on education. NYSUT.org is an important website to visit on a regular basis to know what is happening at the state level regarding legislation as it relates to teachers and education. SCMEA, NYSSMA, and NAFME also have websites with valuable information regarding the impact of legislation on the music education landscape. Furthermore, being an informed voter is not enough. You must actually VOTE in EVERY ELECTION. Know the issues. Know the candidates. Make informed choices that protect our classrooms and our livelihoods.

14. Have you ever written a letter to your political leaders? If so, when was the last time you did so?

Writing letters or otherwise engaging in other meaningful dialogue with your political leaders is critical. As a resident, you have the right to be heard by your political leaders on the local, state and even national levels. Let your board of education know that as a taxpayer, arts education is important to you. Let them know it is a primary reason for your choice to reside in the community you do. Let your State Assembly person, Senator, and the Governor know just how the "Tax Cap" legislation is impacting the ability of our schools to deliver high quality music instruction. Let these state leaders know that every school needs to offer a comprehensive music program taught by highly qualified, highly effective, CERTIFIED music teachers.