

Music Advocacy = Program Success, Part I
“Sharing the Good News with the Right People”
by Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

Advocacy Defined: Music advocacy, by definition, means we are vocal about our various thoughts and beliefs concerning the importance of music education for everyone. Thus, we continue to gather positive data concerning the impact of music learning and the countless benefits of investing in the study of music. However, the information itself is of little value unless it is delivered to the right people. Perhaps our greatest challenge is the dissemination of facts and figures supporting the advantages of being a music-maker in today’s world.

Who Needs to Hear this Good News?

Parents: We know over 80% of today’s musicians developed their musical skills while attending school. Clearly, choosing to add music to a child’s daily curriculum is greatly influenced by parents. Unfortunately, if the parents are not privy to the latest information pointing to the positive effects of music study, their decision is bound to be less enthusiastic compared to those parents who know and understand the myriad of rewards generated via music learning and music performance. In the beginning stages of music study, the parents play a pivotal role in encouraging their child to explore the various avenues of music making.

Administrators: School administrators want to do what is right for their student clientele. These are the people who determine the framework of the school day, both in terms of scheduling and class offerings. We assume administrators understand the need for a comprehensive arts program, as well as the obvious correlation between outstanding academic students and music students; however, that is a very naive assumption. Invariably those students who are the academically high achievers are the same students involved in the school music program. Do the administrators believe it is a result of “the smart students choosing music,” or do they understand it is, in fact, “the study of music that makes students smarter?”

Counselors: Counselors and advisors are often charged with the responsibility of helping students complete high school and prepare for college. The various mandated state requirements combined with the suggested preparatory requisites for admission to college often limits the amount of time for additional classes, i.e., MUSIC.

If counselors consider music to be an extra-curricular subject, they will often advise students against pursuing their music study, replacing band, orchestra, or choir with a different class. Understanding the value of music learning affords the advisor a greater advantage that ultimately supports the end goal: student success.

Boards of Education: Herein lies one of the key areas we often overlook or avoid. By design, the American educational system encourages local involvement in establishing the school curriculum by creating a Board of Education. As elected officials, Board members guide administrators and charge them with the duty of carrying out the various Board decisions. However, it is crucial that every Board member receives ongoing communication concerning the value of music learning and music making, as the Board has the final say on any issue. As a result, this often-forgotten, small group of decision-makers can be the most influential supporters in assuring the certainty of MUSIC in our schools.

Community Leaders: Whether it is members of the Chamber of Commerce, the officers of the Rotary Club, or the Mayor’s Council, every community has a group of influential key leaders whose thoughts and opinions carry political clout and are heeded by those who organize and administrate our school programs. They can sway public opinion through the media as well as their personal network of trusted colleagues. Community leaders understand the importance of a strong school system and they can sway public opinion through the media, as well as their personal network of trusted colleagues. We must work hand-in-hand with these people to insure the implementation of music education.

Students: As we eagerly share the latest discoveries about music learning with the adult world, we miss one of our most potent audiences: the music student. In the midst of teaching music, we must make the time to integrate the all-important music advocacy materials into their daily lesson plans. Perhaps retention in music programs would increase if the young artists knew of the often-hidden rewards of music study. In addition to the intrinsic joy of creating music, there are many educational, emotional, and economical reasons to participate in a musical organization.

Need More Ideas?: Each of these six categories could easily be split into several sub-divisions:

Parents: Elementary, middle school, high school, college, non-music parents, parents with students who have graduated, and parents who are about to have students ready for music.

Administrators: Superintendents, Assistant Super-intendents, Curriculum Coordinators, Principals, Assistant Principals, Department Heads, Supervisors, etc.

Counselors: Those who serve as counselors are often other educators in the school, local ministers, coaches, a favorite teacher, assigned advisors; literally anyone who has an influence on curriculum decisions.

Boards of Education: Present members, candidates for future Board positions, past Board participants, and those who are close friends of Board members.

Community Leaders: Every business person in the town, members of the clergy, the local politicians, and even the morning coffee club made up of the shakers-and-movers in the town.

Students: Those presently in music, those getting ready to explore their musical careers, and those who appreciate music. From the nursery to the nursing home, everyone is a potential music student.

Moving Out of the Comfort Zone: Unfortunately, we often find ourselves “preaching to the choir.” It is not difficult to get musicians, music educators, and music parents to agree about the importance of music; these are the people who have already made a commitment and the music advocacy information simply confirms their favorable posture. It is now time to move out of the comfort zone and begin to communicate with those who are not involved in music. We have a great story to tell because making music is more than playing an instrument or singing in a choir. Music creates a blueprint of success that outlines every aspect of life.

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser is a well known name in the music education world as a teacher, clinician, author, composer, consultant, adjudicator and above all, a trusted friend to anyone interested in working with young people in developing a desire for excellence. His own career involves ten years of successful college band directing at Northern Michigan University, the University of Missouri, and New Mexico State University. During this time, Tim developed highly acclaimed groups in all areas of the instrumental and vocal field. Following three years in the music industry, he created Attitude Concepts for Today, an organization designed to manage the many requests for workshops, seminars and convention speaking engagements focusing on the area of positive attitude and effective leadership training. In addition, Tim is presently serving on the music faculty at Duquesne University. Tim's books, produced by G.I.A. Publications, the Art of Successful Teaching and The Joy of Inspired Teaching, are best-sellers in the music profession. He is also co-author of Hal Leonard's popular band method, Essential Elements, as well as the creator of the highly acclaimed Director's Communication Kits. Tim is a graduate of Ball State University and the University of Alabama. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate Degree from VanderCook College of Music. Tim has been recipient of the distinguished Sudler Order of Merit from the John Philip Sousa Foundation as well as the first recipient of the Mr. Holland's Award for his commitment and dedication to the development of youth in music. Most recently, he received The Music Industry Award from the Midwest Clinic Board of Directors.

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