

# Conducting Advocacy

## PMEA District 1's Advocacy Newsletter

Written by Emily Wardle, Advocacy Representative



### Advocacy Advice from Mairi Cooper, PA Teacher of the Year!

December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 was a monumental day for Mairi Cooper and all of Pennsylvania music educators, as yet another music teacher from District 1 was selected as Teacher of the Year (Dave Woten, District 1 teacher in the North Allegheny School District, was named PA Teacher of the Year in 2008). You may have already read about Mairi's amazing accomplishments over the years, but she graciously took time to enumerate what advocacy means to her.

"For me, advocacy (whether it is for music or public education) is not an event – it is a philosophy. I believe strongly that the future of our nation can only be built in accordance with a strong educational system for *all* our children, regardless of economic background, race, gender, religious preferences, or sexual orientation. I also fundamentally believe that teaching creativity is a critical component in our development as a nation. It is our ability to create new solutions to problems that places us uniquely in a global economy. So I link the health of the arts, and for me, particularly music, with the health of our nation's future.

I have been fortunate to teach in a music department that is very committed to the long-term health of the arts and is not simply interested in the health of the music program during each individual's tenure. For me, the leadership of Shawn Funk is at the heart of my experience. He has always kept one eye on the future and one eye on everything that is happening in the community. In our department, Shawn always emphasizes the importance of relationship building within individual schools, our entire department, the school district, the community, and the Greater Pittsburgh area. Each of us in the department has our strengths and contributes to the department in a variety of ways that help with the overall advocacy.

At the heart of our advocacy is awareness of the needs of our students, the school district, and the community. We do a lot of outreach concerts in the community. Our groups perform in local stores, nursing homes, and retirement centers. Our concert programs include information about the importance of music education.



We use common verbiage, pinpointing areas that we want parents to understand. The strength of our program is in the general music classes at the elementary level, but this is the area where advocacy is the most difficult. We therefore make it a point to highlight this throughout our district concerts, and we also do a number of joint concerts. This helps parents see the music community as a whole rather than simply their child's individual experience. As a department we are actively engaged in professional development. Many of our faculty members present at conferences and Dennis Emert is the State President for PMEA. Dennis' position communicates current local, state, and national initiatives to us. We apply for recognition awards so we can generate publicity about our program (such as the NAMM and Middle States Association Exemplary program awards).

And finally, we educate. We educate our students. We educate their parents. We educate community members. We educate administration. We educate each other and we educate ourselves. We never stop gathering information about the importance of music programs and making sure that we can articulate that importance to the community that supports us."

- Mairi Cooper, PA Teacher of the Year 2015

*Mairi teaches 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade orchestra, AP Music Theory, Piano, Essential Elements of Music, World Music, 8<sup>th</sup> grade orchestra at Dorseyville Middle School, and 4-5<sup>th</sup> grade strings at O'Hara Elementary School in the Fox Chapel Area School District.*

Thank you for your time and congratulations, Mairi!!



**"Offering quality education to *all* of our children is *not* a nicety. It is a necessity.**

**Teaching creativity is *not* a nicety. It is a necessity.**

**Music in our schools is *not* a nicety. It is a necessity."**

- Mairi Cooper (Music Teacher, PA Teacher of the Year 2015) – See the entire speech [here](#).

**Check out these sites for relevant advocacy and music education information:**

**"PMEA Retiree Resource Registry"**

Paul Fox has spearheaded an initiative to document and collect Retired PMEA Members' interests and specialty areas. Please look at his work [here](#) and [here](#), as these valued retirees are willing and available to help you, your students, and your program/department in everyday situations as well as with advocacy!

**"2015 PMEA Awards Breakfast Speech"**

Mairi Cooper spoke at PMEA's Advocacy Day in Harrisburg as well as at the Saturday morning Awards Breakfast. Do yourself a favor and see what awesome insight and perspective she shared. Her speech might give you ideas for your own advocacy conversations.

**Get to know your advocacy rep!**



**Emily Wardle**

Emily is a K-6 General Music/Choir teacher in the Washington Area School District. She attended PMEA District 1 events throughout her education at Belle Vernon Area and studied music education at Duquesne University. She earned a Curriculum & Instruction Master's Degree through Clarion University, is pursuing an ESL certification, and is also the treasurer of PMEA District 1. Emily is committed to sharing positive music advocacy news and ideas with District 1's musical members!

Emily can be contacted at [emily.s.wardle@gmail.com](mailto:emily.s.wardle@gmail.com).

## **Five Minutes to Advocacy**

Take a few minutes out of your week to positively affect your music program and protect its future! An idea: write the task in your calendar so you'll be more likely to complete it. If you already do these suggestions regularly, spend a few minutes to improve your program via another action.

**April 15 – Jazz Appreciation Month** is here again! Expose your students to *jazz at least once this month*. Some ideas include background music, writing prompts, sight reading, introductory scat singing, improvising rhythms/melodies, learning about jazz music and/or jazz musicians, movement activities, blues scale work, website exploration, music theory analysis, etc. There are lots of websites and resources out there for beginning jazzers so there's no need to be afraid of the genre anymore!

**April 29 –** Now is a great time to consider attending the **PMEA Summer Conference**. If your district hasn't given you permission to attend the Annual Conference during the school year, see if you can engage in some (less cost-prohibitive) professional development this summer! You might even be able to garner district support since it's not during the school year and wouldn't incur as many expenses. You don't know unless you ask, so give it a try!

**May 13 –** Look ahead to the year's end and the start of the new school year; prepare your start-of-year copies and complete year-end obligations fully, or better yet, early! If you are ahead of the game in fulfilling professional duties, it sheds a good light on your program and speaks well of you.

**May 27 –** Shamelessly plug your program! If your district has a website, newsletter, class webpage, or assignment page, compose a little blurb about music class/ensemble for it! You can share a music quote or website (feel free to steal some from my past newsletters!) or write a little paragraph summarizing music class and accomplishments this past school year.

**Please feel free to share this newsletter with non-PMEA music teachers in your district and any other music supporters who may benefit from the information or ideas. Thank you!**