

Conducting Advocacy

PMEA District 1's Advocacy Newsletter

Written by Emily Wardle, Advocacy Representative

Boosting Your Program through Music Boosters

Teamwork. Vision. Cooperation. Support. Without these, a music program cannot have true long-term success. Music educators work tirelessly to ensure students have the best musical experiences using the resources available, and although there may be a support system of coworkers and administrators, sometimes we cannot do it all (as baffling as that may seem!). **Enter the music boosters.**

A team of people – a coalition, if you will – behind you is extremely powerful, as these people can literally take a load of footwork, paperwork, phone calls, etc. out of your hands. They can be your voice and visual presence at school board meetings, especially in times of need. In contrast to the fact that educators' advocacy efforts may be viewed as trying to save their own jobs, boosters' advocacy may not be as easily or readily misinterpreted. Some schools have boosters for particular groups (i.e. orchestra, high school marching band, etc.) while others have boosters for entire departments.



Consider the potential impact if a whole district's (or building's, at least, for larger districts) booster groups combined forces to create a "Fine Arts Booster" organization! Even if your school already has boosters for a group/department, it may be worthwhile to adopt a more all-inclusive approach. Elementary programs are "easy" targets for budget cuts because few have organizations to stand up and fight for the continuation of the program. We know how crucial solid elementary programs are to a district's musical health and should support the programs that may be threatened. For some schools, this may look like a full-school Music Boosters group while others may desire to have a K-12 General Music, 4-12 Band, 3-12 Orchestra, or a 3-12 Chorus Booster. The variations are limitless. Small schools may even benefit from having an Extracurricular Booster group to fund and support ALL extracurriculars (sports and music together?!? What!!!)

Opening membership to community members, school board personnel, and students is something to consider. Be aware that from a legislative perspective, people who aren't voting residents hold less sway over school board personnel. More people in your corner means a greater volume when you need to mobilize, especially if at a moment's notice. Identify active people in your district and tap into the valuable resource!



Although it seems like quite an undertaking, especially changing the setup of an established organization, the reasoning behind a more encompassing booster organization is persuasive. Your coalition is there to help you educate students in the art of music. Their purpose is to share the vision of the district as well as your vision for the program, and they can help you in many ways. To help the community take them and their efforts seriously, encourage your boosters to not limit their activities to fund-raising. Although fund-raising is helpful and necessary, if your boosters are solely seen as money-makers then budget cuts may be suggested, with solutions presented of the boosters absorbing these costs. Boosters can certainly help fund extracurricular endeavors but they should also be active in the advocacy and immersion of students in music.

Obviously, having a booster group is **PROACTIVE**. These people have a vested interest in the maintenance of a music program and see firsthand the benefits of music education. We should remember, however, that this local concern must be calibrated. We should do well to ensure that the vision and perspective of all booster activities are student- and music-centric, which can be a challenge for adults who may have clashing personalities, opinions, and varying priorities. Keep open the lines of communication, attend meetings, read policies, and stay informed! After all, all that your boosters do ultimately can and will come back to you. One way to promote the importance of the organization is to assess a membership fee so that anyone can join but all have a financial investment in the program.

In the end, we are a music *department* and must act like one. Reframing your approach to booster organizations may help this, your advocacy efforts... and your daily doings!

For more information, please refer to Dr. John L. Benham's *Music Advocacy Moving from Survival to Vision* book.

"Music can change the world because it can change people." – Bono (from the group U2)

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 PMEAs' 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! (I know I shared this at the end of last year, but it's such a great resource that I wanted to share it again!)

["What if Every Child had Access to Music Education from Birth?"](#)

A phenomenal TEDx Talks video that explores the cognitive effects of music at all stages of one's life.

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 PMEAs 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 PMEAs 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.

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.

October 7 – Take a moment and complete the D1 MIOSM Activities Survey. It won't take long, I promise!



Chuck Neidhardt, Pennsylvania state MIOSM chairperson, has requested each District Advocacy Representative to collect MIOSM activity information from our members. I have created a short and simple Google Forms Survey and would love your input on what you do in the month of March to promote and support music education. Any activity, big or small, is important and we'd like to document it. We're looking for activities from current teachers, retired teachers, and teachers within all disciplines of music. If your school musical falls in the month of March, that counts – please tell us! Please don't put this on the back burner; take a moment to provide us with some information. The link is <http://goo.gl/forms/WTnBmOquKL>, or you can click [here](#). Thank you!

October 21 – Sign up for the District 1 Workshop entitled "Back to Basics." There will be several great sessions to attend, including one discussing booster organizations (hello, advocacy!); The workshop registration is FREE for PMEAs members, it's a one-day event, and it's not overnight so it won't cost your district **nearly** as much as they might assume (compared to the Annual Conference, at least!). Go on, put in a conference request and see what happens!

November 4 – Send your school's booster group a thank you card for their work. Perhaps they were involved with your band performances at the football games, helped with a start-of-the-year meeting, provided support for open house, etc. etc. Letting them know you appreciate their work and that they help make students' musical experiences better will go a long way!

November 18 – As we approach Thanksgiving, think about what you are thankful for in your musical, professional, and teaching life. (It may seem silly but reflecting upon positive things and thoughts can help change your perspective!) It's easy to forget the reason behind what you do every single day, and advocating for that can go by the wayside when you get bogged down with daily living. Take a moment to re-center yourself and remember what you're thankful for in the music education realm. Remembering this throughout the year will help you be a better advocate for your students, program, and job!

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