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Educate Our Advocates!

By Suzanne L. Burton

Advocacy is letting everyone you know about the importance of what you do.”¹ These words from MENC president Willie Hill Jr. remind us how critical advocacy is to sustaining music education programs in our schools. As music educators, we need to be among the greatest advocates for music education. Certainly we believe that what we do is important. Yet many of us have found that administrators, teachers, parents, and sometimes students do not understand and appreciate what we do, often due to their inaccurate perceptions of what music education entails.

Impressions of music education are often formed in a performance-based context. What people see at a performance—the band playing expressively in tune and in time, the lovely blending and versatility of the voices of students in the choir, or children singing a Zulu tribal song while performing an authentic dance and playing authentic instruments—is really the end product of our efforts. However, as music educators, we know there is much more to music education than what the audience sees during a polished performance. We take many steps to reach the goal of a final performance, and many of our potential advocates do not recognize or understand these steps. Those outside our profession may view

*Teaching parents,
colleagues, and
community members
what happens in our
music programs is
one way to
encourage them to
more actively
support music
education.*



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Actively participating in faculty meetings is one way to show your colleagues that music is an essential part of the overall curriculum.

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Figure 1. Orientation Itinerary

- Welcome (3 minutes)
 - Introduction, Musical Background (3 minutes)
 - Curriculum Overview (15 minutes)
 - Assessment Plan, Report Cards, and Portfolios (7 minutes)
 - Department Handbook and Classroom Expectations (7 minutes)
 - Questions and Answers (10 minutes)
 - Refreshments
-

music education as unimportant because they do not understand the educational process required to reach the final performance.

By educating the community about what we do in music class and how important music education programs are to all students, we can build a stronger foundation of support for what we do as music educators and for what students learn in our classes. We may accomplish this by creating educational opportunities for some of our most-needed advocates: administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Tell Them What You Do

Those who are not involved in music education generally do not understand what music educators do because they are unaware of how music education functions on a daily basis in the classroom. To educate others about what you do, consider holding an orientation for parents and guardians. This will set the stage for you to present the curriculum you will use with your students.

The optimal time for an orientation is at the beginning of a new academic year, semester, or class. You can hold your meeting in conjunction with a schoolwide open house or at a separate school function. Whenever you decide to hold the orientation, check the school calendar to see whether any conflicts exist with the day, time, and place you have chosen. Depending on the classes or ensembles you teach, you may need to hold more than one meeting.

After you have chosen the date, you will need to publicize the orientation. Invite people to come several weeks beforehand, making sure to get the word out in as many ways as possible. Announce the orientation through postcards, in a handout for students to take home, in an announcement in the school's newsletter, on the school Web site, and as part of your voice-mail greeting. Using a combination of these strategies will help you to reach more people, increasing the likelihood for a good turnout.

Be certain to invite your arts and building administrators. This will demonstrate that you want their support and believe that your program is worthy of the time it takes to communicate with parents and guardians. Administrators who attend will meet people who are interested in your program while learning more about what you do as a music educator.

Organization is critical to having a successful orientation. When planning, limit the meeting time to no more than forty-five minutes. Your primary goal is for the audience to leave energized and enthused about music education, and too long a meeting may defeat your purpose. To that end, creating a detailed itinerary with a projected time frame for each segment of the meeting will help you to organize your time and materials (figure 1). Consider making packets of the handouts you will distribute and creating a PowerPoint presentation of the handouts you plan to discuss.

If possible, have an administrator begin the orientation with a greeting. After the greeting, introduce yourself and speak briefly about your qualifications and musical background. Then, give an overview of your curriculum and how it relates to state and PreK–12 National Standards for Music Education.² Provide a handout that briefly describes your curriculum and explains what concepts and skills the students will be learning, why they are learning them, and how they will learn them (figure 2). Next, discuss how you will measure and evaluate student learning. At this time, provide a sample assessment form and, if appropriate, a sample report card.³ In addition, if your school utilizes portfolio assessment, describe this process.

After you have given a curriculum overview, discuss procedures that are specific to your program. For example, if you teach band or choir, provide copies of your handbook and touch on the main points of its contents, such as how much practice time is needed per week, how students should practice, how students obtain and turn in uniforms or concert attire, when and where rehearsals and performances take place, and how you handle absences from performances. If you teach general music, give a handout that includes classroom expectations, ideas for resources for the home, and a schedule of musical programs. Be sure to give information on how parents or guardians can contact you. Conclude the orientation with a question-and-answer session, and if possible, provide refreshments to encourage informal interaction and discussion.

Show Them How Students Learn Music

Parents, teachers, and administrators typically see what students learn in music class through concerts, musicals, assemblies, and school programs. While they may appreciate the end product, the people in the audience often do not understand the process taken to achieve a successful performance. By demonstrating how students learn music and how you teach music, you can create educational opportunities that foster a greater understanding

Figure 2. Example Handout

of the importance of music education for potential advocates. One way to achieve this is through an “informance,” a presentation designed to highlight the teaching and learning process.⁴

Your specific teaching and learning context, together with your curricular scope and sequence, will help you determine how to construct your informance. The following is an account of an actual informance for second-grade children and their parents that was held at the end of a marking period. This informance was created as an outgrowth of the curriculum that the parents received at the orientation (figure 2).

Beginning the Program. On the evening of the informance the second-grade children excitedly rush into the music room, running ahead of their parents. Two girls head toward the barred instruments and begin playing ostinati and singing a song that students will demonstrate later. In a corner of the room, a few children are playing a call-and-response game that they will teach their parents. Several other children engage in “rhythm talk,” and others are showing their parents all of the musical treasures in the room. Tonight their parents will experience what their children are learning in music class, and the children can’t wait! “Come in and sit down on the carpet,” says Mrs. Morris, the music teacher, beckoning to all.

The children and parents sit down in a circle. It’s time to welcome everyone to music class with the hello song. Immediately after singing the song, the teacher and children begin to pat the beat to the traditional duple-meter chant “My Mother, Your Mother.”

Rhythmic Patterns. The class speaks the chant several times. Mrs. Morris chants duple-meter patterns with rhythm syllables for the class to imitate at the end of each repetition. She then produces rhythm patterns previously written on oak tag poster board. The children read the patterns with ease. Mrs. Morris asks the children to use the rhythm syllables to create their own patterns and then write them on dry-erase boards. A chatter of rhythm patterns can be heard as the children

Music in Second Grade

We Learn Music Through

- Singing
- Chanting
- Moving
- Dancing
- Playing Instruments
- Listening
- Creating
- Improvising
- Reading
- Writing
- Audiating
- Describing
- Evaluating
- Cooperative Learning

Mrs. Morris, Music Specialist

Curriculum Highlights

Singing

- Alone and with others
- With dynamics and expression
- Authentic, multicultural folk songs
- Tonal variety
- I, V⁷, IV patterns
- Ostinati and rounds

Rhythmic Chanting

- Alone and with others
- With dynamics and expression
- Rhythmic chants and poems
- Metrical variety
- Duple- and triple-meter rhythm patterns with rhythm syllables
- Rhythmic ostinati and rounds

Moving

- Flow, weight, space, time
- With partners
- Games and formal dances

Playing Instruments

- Alone and with others
- Pitched and nonpitched percussion instruments
- Rhythm and tonal ostinati

Form

- Call and response
- AB, ABA, rondo

Listening

- Instrument families and ensembles
- Describe and evaluate
- Form and analysis

Improvising and Creating

- Vocally singing and chanting
- With instruments
- Movement
- Compositions

Reading and Writing

- Content Connections/Collaborations

Connections made through the second-grade musical *Peace to Us* using songs, art, literature, and historical references on the topic of peace

get the dry-erase boards and markers and begin working. “Who would like to share their patterns with the class?” asks the teacher. Almost all of the children raise their hands. “Oh my! So many of you. I have an idea: turn to your mom or dad and teach them your patterns!” she says. The room is filled with a noisy productivity as children share their duple-meter patterns with their parents.

In this segment of the informance, the children demonstrated their ability to keep beat and their understanding of

duple meter by chanting rhythm patterns with rhythm syllables and by reading, creating, and writing rhythm patterns. Moreover, by teaching the parents their created patterns, the children developed a deeper understanding of duple meter while the parents became actively engaged in the class.

In the following activity, the class will sing an adaptation of the traditional song “Shortnin’ Bread,” discuss the form of the song, and begin to learn rhythm and tonal ostinati to accompany themselves.

"Shortnin' Bread." Mrs. Morris takes the spoons from her shelf and begins to play them to the microbeat of the song "Shortnin' Bread." Pantomiming their teacher playing the spoons, the children join in. "Read-y sing," sings Mrs. Morris on the first pitch of the song. The children begin to sing, imitating Mrs. Morris playing the spoons to the A section of the song and then patsching the macrobeat on the floor for the B section. "What is the form of this piece?" asks the music teacher. "ABA," chime the students. "How do you know? Whisper how you know to your parent." The class sings the song again; this time several students play the spoons for the A section.

After singing the song, Mrs. Morris sings tonal patterns based on major tonic and dominant seventh chords. "I am going to sing some tonal patterns. Your job is to tell me if I am singing a major tonic or dominant seventh chord function," she says. Mrs. Morris sings, "so-mi-do," and several children raise their hands. "What type of pattern, Alec?" she queries. "Major tonic!" he replies with enthusiasm. "How do you know?" she asks. "Because it has a combination of do-mi-so," he answers, singing the solfège. Mrs. Morris sings additional tonal patterns for the students to identify and explains to the parents that the major tonic and dominant seventh function patterns will be used to accompany "Shortnin' Bread" on the barred instruments.

The parents learned how to identify ABA form and major primary chord functions from their children during this part of the informance. Next, the children will harmonize "Shortnin' Bread" with several ostinati that are based on the major tonic and dominant seventh function and played on the barred instruments. The children will then model how to sing the song with accompaniment to their parents.

After the class sings the song with the spoons and barred instrument ostinati, Mrs. Morris directs the children to teach their parents their part on the instruments. "See, Mom. It's harder than you think!" says Marcus as he teaches his mother how to play the spoons. Jenny is careful to model and teach her father the correct position for playing the bass xylophone

part. The class sings several repetitions of the song so all of the parents can have a turn playing the different instruments and experience being participants in an ensemble. At the end of the activity, one mother remarks, "This is wonderful! I never knew what went on in music class!"

There is much more to music education than what the audience sees during a polished performance.

Closing Activities. Mrs. Morris has everyone return to the circle for a listening activity. She plays a short recorded selection in ABA form. The children identify the form, instruments, tempo, and dynamics they heard and compare the form and style of the selection with "Shortnin' Bread." At the end of the activity, the class determines that the ensemble performing the music was an orchestra. As a closing to the informance, Mrs. Morris will have the children teach their parents call-and-response form with a movement game-song from Africa.

"Okay, everyone up!" exclaims Mrs. Morris. "It's time to play 'Che Che Koolay.'" Several students are chosen for the call part while the rest of the class provides the response. After the demonstration, all of the children lead with the call, and the parents echo back the response with appropriate movement. The game ends in laughter and with Mrs. Morris announcing that it is time to end the class. Groans of disappointment are heard; the children want to continue music class. "This was fun!" says Midori. "Can I make a suggestion?" offers a father. "Do this more often!"

While not every aspect of the music curriculum was demonstrated, this

informance was a success on several levels. The parents experienced the joy of making music from a child's perspective in addition to realizing that there was a music curriculum in place and that their children were learning specific musical skills and concepts. Moreover, the children were very proud of themselves as they taught their parents, and teaching their parents reinforced what they had been learning in music class.

Other Options. Although the informance described here was for a second-grade general music class, programs like it can easily occur in other music education settings. For instance, you could hold a music "Guest Day" in which parents and guardians are invited to come to school and "shadow" their children during a class period or rehearsal. This type of format may also include administrators and teachers or perhaps be used outside the school day.

At a concert, the ensemble could demonstrate the teaching or rehearsal strategies used to achieve musical goals. You could also highlight the process of how students learn a specific piece of repertoire. Having ensemble members play or sing themes of a piece before it is performed can engage the listeners more deeply in the music. Students could also give presentations of historical, background, or interpretive information regarding the repertoire to be performed.

In addition, you can use technology as a teaching tool that increases exposure to music education teaching and learning. A PowerPoint presentation or video, narrated by the music educator and students, could showcase how students learn and how teaching strategies are used in the classroom or rehearsal. You could integrate these video presentations into a concert or create a video loop to play before or after a performance and at open houses, conferences, assemblies, and other school functions. Ideas for structuring an informance abound when educating others about the music education process is the focus.

Be Visible and Available

Being visible and available to parents, teachers, administrators, and

students can also help you develop advocates for music education. Typically, the number of music faculty within a school is small in comparison to the number of teachers in other content areas, and the music wing is often separated from the rest of the school. In some cases, music educators teach in several schools. These circumstances create conditions for music educators to become isolated, have low visibility, and give an impression of not being available. Because it is unlikely that faculty will come to you to find out about your program, seeking and creating ways to connect with people in your educational community will only help you promote your music education program.

To be viewed as an equal partner in education, participation in school activities with teachers of other subjects is important, especially if they are to acknowledge music education as a viable part of the overall curriculum. A variety of ways to increase your visibility exists. Even if you are not required to attend faculty meetings, make a point of doing so. If you teach in more than one school, try to attend faculty meetings at the different schools whenever possible. Get to know what is happening in the lives of the teachers and administrators you work with. Eat lunch in the faculty work room. Be available and visible during open houses, prepared with progress reports on conference days, and in attendance at school-wide in-services. Attend PTA and school board meetings. Volunteer to be on a committee outside music education. Participate in bus duty, lunch duty, and other school-related activities. Your participation not only increases the visibility of your program, but also indicates that you are a member of the educational community and that you care about those you teach and work with. The time and effort you spend cultivating relationships with the educational community at large will reap great returns in support for you as a professional and for music education in your school.

Advocacy concerns all of us who are in the music education profession. By informing the educational commu-

nity of what we do as music educators and by demonstrating the process of how music is learned and taught, we can elevate understanding of why music education is important to the growth and well-being of our students, thereby increasing our base of advocates.⁵ Once we have built this base of advocates, we can continue to educate them about how they can support music education. (The Web sites and publications listed in the MENC Resources box can help us in these efforts.) As we work alongside these newly educated advocates, we can make great strides in promoting the continued presence of music education in our schools.

Notes

1. Willie L. Hill Jr., "Advocacy in Music Education," *Teaching Music* 10, no. 2 (2002): 5.
2. For more on the National Standards, see MENC, *The School Music Program: A*

New Vision (Reston, VA: MENC, 1994), available at <http://www.menc.org/publication/books/prek12st.html>; MENC, *Opportunity to Learn Standards for Music Instruction: Grades PreK–12* (Reston, VA: MENC, 1994), available at <http://www.menc.org/publication/books/otl.html>

3. For more on assessment, see MENC Committee on Performance Standards, *Performance Standards for Music: Strategies and Benchmarks for Assessing Progress Toward the National Standards, Grades PreK–12* (Reston, VA: MENC, 1996); MENC, *Spotlight on Assessment* (Reston, VA: MENC, 2000); and Kent Seidel, ed., *Assessing Student Learning: A Practical Guide* (Cincinnati, OH: Alliance for Curriculum Reform, 2000).

4. The author thanks Cynthia Taggart for sharing the idea of "informance."

5. For more on educating others, see Cynthia Crump Taggart, "Our Role in Educating the Educational Community," *General Music Today* 5, no. 1 (1991): 14–17. ■

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MENC Resources

Online

These three Web sites offer a variety of advocacy-related information.

- <http://www.menc.org>
- <http://www.musicfriends.org>
- <http://www.supportmusic.com>

Publications

- ... *And Music for All*. U.S. Congress members speak of the importance of music education for every child. 2001. Item #1511.
- *Critical Links*. Summaries and discussion of sixty-two research studies that examine the effects of arts learning on students' social and academic skills. Produced by Arts Education Partnership with support from the U.S. Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts. 2002. Item #1715.
- *The Benefits of the Study of Music: Why We Need Music Education in Our Schools*. Brochure of quotes and statistics on why music education is needed in the schools. 2002. Item #4014.
- *Growing Up Complete: The Imperative for Music Education*. Discussion of the need for music as part of a well-balanced, comprehensive education. 1991. Item #1018.
- *Music Education Advocate's Tool Kit*. A complete advocacy presentation kit for promoting music education to school boards and other organizations. 2001. Item #1026.
- *Music Makes the Difference: Music, Brain Development, and Learning*. Reference materials that can be used in the promotion of music education. 2000. Item #1668.

You may order these materials at <http://www.menc.org> or by calling 1-800-828-0229.