

How to Advocate for Music Education (Even When You Have No Clue How to Do So)

By Tony Mazzochi - Posted on December 12/2016 (www.musicparentsguide.com)



Whether you realise it or not, if your child is starting music study through their school's music program this year, you are now a potentially powerful advocate for music education.

Since your child expressed an interest in singing or playing an instrument — and you said “yes: — you, and hundreds of thousands of other parents around the world, stated loud and clear that you value music as part of your child's education.

Those of us who have enjoyed an education rich in the arts are aware of its many benefits. Although I developed high-level musical abilities and a lifelong appreciation of music with the help of my school program, research has proven that music education does much more than that: it develops creativity, responsibility, discipline, perseverance, composure, pride in results, collaboration, confidence, social and communications skills, and emotional maturity *for all students*, not just a chosen few.

Still, music education finds itself on the “danger of extinction list” each year due to budget constraints, scheduling trends, and — perhaps most concerning — *public apathy*. A general lack of awareness of the importance of music in every school day can (and will) lead to an erosion in that school's program. Even in districts where most students start an instrument in school in 4th or 5th grade, teachers and parents continue to search to find strength in numbers when it comes time to advocate for their programs.

As I have written before, it's important for students to study and enjoy “art for art's sake” — and for us to advocate for music education using this mantra, at times. But the sad truth is that ironically, due to decades of attrition in school music programs, most parents, teachers, and administrators have not experienced the intrinsic joy of music making and the value it could have offered in their own school lives. Therefore, it is up to this generation of parents and students to create a new level of understanding utilising a viewpoint school administrators and boards can understand — albeit narrow and sometimes short-sighted. And that is the effect of music education on the whole child, including test scores. The more data parents can gather regarding the benefit of music education on all aspects of humanity, the more we can build advocacy efforts by creating dialogue that best relates to those who will determine the future of our music programs, sad as that may be to some of us.

Being a music advocate is not always about selling brownies at a music concert, helping wash band uniforms, or attending countless Board of Education meetings to give a speech on the value of

music education (although all of these things are important!). Rather, supporting children in their musical instruction, understanding the value it has on their human development, and being present when it counts is sometimes all that is needed to create a powerful force for music education in schools.

Here are 3 ways you can be a music advocate without completely changing your life around:

Make a commitment to music instruction for more than one year. Mindset is (almost) everything when it comes to staying in your music program for an extended period of time. If parents and/or students choose to “hedge their bets” and try music for only a year, more than likely they will quit when times get tough — which will be very early in instruction. All said and done, 15 hours of total music instruction in one year is certainly not enough time on task to decide whether or not to study music for the rest of ones’ K-12 life. Considering that teaching children to have a “growth mindset,” which focuses on “process” over “talent”, helps make them into high achievers in school and in life, a commitment to more than one year of music instruction is potentially life-changing for all children.

Understand that talent is not for a select few. Every student in our nation deserves to explore the transformative power of music-making during school hours. We should not be satisfied with only a small percentage of students in school participating in music programs, especially when *all* are capable and deserving of it. We must understand that the myth of “natural” and “inborn” talent continues to be debunked through studies of the brain and child development; there is more research of the brain and an abundance of data which shows increased academic performance of students when music is integrated into school curricula. This data is impossible to ignore, and when it’s presented as a concern for *all* students rather than just a select few, there is more of a chance of the message resonating with entire communities and school districts.

Help your children perform as much as possible. We must all emphasise the social aspect of music making. After all, human beings are social creatures who are driven to connect with each other in a variety of ways; this is the primary reason many get involved (and stay) with music — and there is not enough opportunity for collaboration during the school day without the arts. All around the world, group music making is a central part of different cultures, and connecting with others through artistic expression is an extremely powerful experience that should be part of every child’s school life. These types of high-quality performances by school music groups offer some of the best possible advocacy opportunities. These performances — large or small — are a perfect time to share all types of information with parents, teachers, and administrators. Attendance at these concerts is a true showing of support, and when administrators see the crowds at the concerts, it’s clearly reinforced that programs must be protected.

What if every parent chose to keep their children involved in their school’s music program for more than one year? What if we all understood that talent is not for a select few, but for *all* children?

What if our school year was filled with opportunities to perform? The resulting changes in our education system — enrolment, scheduling, staffing, funding, etc. — would be profound. Parents instilling a mindset in their children that insists that music is as much a core subject as anything else is the most powerful advocacy there is.

Ultimately, the number of students involved in school music programs speaks volumes — a volume almost as powerful as the collective beautiful music that will resonate throughout our nation’s classrooms as a result.