



ADVOCACY

Common Sense, Respect and Education

by Jerry Jones

“They’re cutting my program! I need to do some music advocacy!” How many times have you heard this comment, either from a colleague or from yourself?

Unfortunately, by that time it’s too late to do much other than damage control. The time to develop advocacy for our programs is before these words are spoken.

I believe advocacy for our programs begins with two basic elements: respect and education. Unless we develop respect for our colleagues, principals, administrators, and school board members, we will not have the relationships with them that we may need. If they don’t feel as though you respect them during the day to day process, don’t expect them to come to your aid.

Common sense advocacy begins with people (you and me) relating to people

(those with power over our programs) in supportive, encouraging ways. When was the last time you sent an e-mail thanking a school board member or your principal for a positive action taken? I’m not suggesting “brown-nosing,” but I am suggesting that everyone needs to be respected and told that they are doing a good job. Don’t feel respected by your administrators? That doesn’t stop you from respecting them. Once the relationship has developed, then the education process can begin. Many administrators have no idea what we do or why. It’s our job to communicate to them how important what we do is to our students, to the school, to the community, and to the world—yes, our influence is that big. If we can somehow communicate that what we do is truly magical and important, so much the better.

When was the last time you spent time in the faculty lunch room? Too busy, right? Your first and strongest advocates are your fellow teachers in non-music fields; how wonderful it is when they complain about your program being cut! Remember, they will talk about you and what you are doing. What they say about you depends upon you.

Finally, remember that true advocacy begins at home. Like it or not, we are our programs. How we behave toward others affects how people feel about our programs. Start being a great advocate for music before you need to.

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