

All-State: “We are starting new string programs in Minnesota, would you like to help?”

presented by Grant Wilcox

reported by Beth Becker

In this session Grant described the beginnings, development, and success of the string program in Brainerd, which he founded. He started out with 60 kids and has grown the program to 5 orchestras and 200+ students. He also gave advice for starting programs in other districts based on his experience.

Grant emphasized that even though administrators will say that money is not available, funds are accessible if the right people ask for it in the right way. Don't be discouraged — do everything possible to promote string playing. He shared the following ideas:



Grant Wilcox

- Organize a core group of influential community leaders who will serve as spokespersons for the arts. They should represent a varied demographic in the area.
- Make the arts as visible as possible by featuring students in the local arts section of the paper (at his school they have a weekly feature of the different arts departments).
- Work with the other art and music teachers. They are often the most difficult to get on your side.
- Put as much energy and enthusiasm that you can into the job — if kids

like to play and they stick with it, they will get better and the program will grow.

Grant would like all directors to participate in a survey to compare budgets, teaching time, lesson structure and the teacher/student ratio in programs throughout the state. These statistics can be very valuable for creating a model on which to base new programs. He and Brian Cole are also in the middle of coordinating a program with the Minnesota Orchestra where goals will be set and funding secured to start a specified number of programs in the state at a regular pace every few years. †