



ADVOCACY

Advocacy Through a Wider Lens

by Deb Sittko

Pondering the concept of advocacy and what it involves, I wonder what we really think it is. Generally, my sense is that we think of it as an exercise where we stand up for our art and try to teach others why we value it so greatly. We hone our arguments: musical and non-musical benefits, financial, social, developmental and educational rationales. And we scratch our heads and wonder how anyone could possibly not value this miracle that we are part of.

And yet, it seems that we perpetually have to justify our programs to parties that we, frankly, believe ought to wiser and more informed. So, where do our efforts go wrong? Do we not advocate enough? Are we too shy to speak up or just too busy? Do we believe that if we just do our jobs as well as they can be done that surely our product will speak for itself? Or do we adopt a sense of despondence and hope we can hang on long enough to see the winds of time change our situation for the better?

As we see what we work for so constantly under the knife and our positions becoming increasing more demanding what can we do? One of the answers presented at the Fall Clinic has me convinced that in addition to doing the obvious things to promote our programs, we need to think about advocacy from another angle.

Ken Freed told us at the clinic of the

amazing way the whole school at Ramsey International has come around to understanding the power of music in educating the whole child. And what he did, in a word, was to advocate. *But* he did it so wisely. He took an approach that reminded me of the maxim, “give people what they want and they’ll give you what you want.” Ken advocated for what the classroom faculty wanted, not for what he wanted. He showed even the most recalcitrant that the music people were there to help them with their goals. And, lo and behold, they are giving the music people what they want. They have support for their pullout programs that most of us have a hard time imagining. They turned a breach between faculties into a partnership. The support for the program is now not merely an acceptance of a program that parents want, but an army of faculty advocates. Isn’t that what we really want?

It’s time for us to get good at this. We could have a tendency to be irked that we have to become educated about yet another presumably non-musical exercise. On the other hand, look at the return on the investment of time. And think of the fun of working in a situation where you truly feel you’re honored for the contribution your work makes to the whole child. In his presentation, Ken directed us to the work of Larry Scripp and the Music-in-Education National Consortium. I have done this and

am quite excited about what is there. The website is: www.music-in-education.org. Ken encouraged us to look for the connections between our work and that of classroom teachers. We need to learn about skill transfers. We need to embrace collaboration. We each need to become informed on this research and work. We must learn to view our work through a wider lens. This is how we must advocate now.

Ken told us that we are sitting on knowledge that can truly change our school programs. So, we have real homework to do! And, this information hasn’t come to us a moment too soon. We all know how real the budget knife is. We know in our hearts the value of what we give our students. In this day and age that just isn’t enough any more. We can’t just talk — we must learn; we must show; we must teach. This is new and powerful work that is now in our hands. This is work we must commence now.

Deb Sittko teaches orchestra at Irondale High School and Edgewood Middle School in Mounds View District. Working to create bonds between professional performance and the educational worlds, she initiated and followed through in developing the project that resulted in the annual Middle Level Festival Tier 1 & 2 collaboration between MNSOTA and the Minnesota Orchestra. Deb currently serves as MMEA Orchestra Vice President. ♪