

All-State: Politics and Orchestra: The Endless Game

presented by Dr. James Hainlen

Dr. Hainlen taught orchestra in the Stillwater Area School district for 28 years. He retired in 2004 and received his PhD in Educational Administration and Policy from the University of Minnesota in December of 2009.

Dr. Hainlen stated that politics is not just the allocation of values, but the authoritative allocation of values. There will always be “winners” and “losers” because resources are scarce. The resources are important to the parties because they are limited. These “fights” in schools can feel important because they are a sort of status symbol (allocation of values).

The most effective political strategy is to engage early, before the conflict arises. Being proactive is the key! Ignoring political conflicts until they are in full-blown crisis is not an effective strategy. Learn to look at the situation as it is—not as you wish it were. Too often we see these issues become personal. Politics involves compromise.

Winning is viewed as getting what you want, not what is truly the right thing to do. If you are not willing to get involved, don't step in the “arena.” You can't complain when the allocation of values goes against you.

Dr. Hainlen stated some reasons why orchestra teachers tend to lose in political conflicts: we are less visible in our schools because we tend to teach in multiple buildings; orchestra is often the step-child to the band in the music department; orchestra teachers use the excuse of being “too busy” to avoid conflict.

Lastly Dr. Hainlen introduced a leadership model by Robert Terry used to identify problems in politics. Using Terry's model MNSOTA members strove to solve various conflicts between orchestra and other school situations. He also recommends reading Bill George's book *7 Lessons for Leading in Crisis* (2009 Jossey-Bass) for more information about leadership and politics. ‡