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Reverse Economics Breaks the \$ 11,000,000 Mark

by Dr. John L. Benham

The reverse economic concept has been used to save over \$11 million in proposed cuts to public school music programs. The following article highlights some responses to frequently asked questions concerning this concept.

1. What are the biggest problems when working to save music programs?

TIME. Teachers usually receive less than 30 days notice of the decision to cut their program. The prevalent attitudes seem to be "they won't cut music in our district" or "there is nothing we can do anyway."

SKEPTICISM. There is much concern as to whether the concept works and/or whether an outsider can do anything about the problem.

LACK OF DATA. Most districts do not maintain enrollment statistics showing student participation by individual program, school, and grade.

2. What process do you use when serving as a consultant?

Five-steps are followed:

- The appropriate data must be collected. We prefer to have this done before we get to the school district.

- The consultant, music supervisor, and teaching staff need to discuss any underlying issues (disunity, politics, etc.), develop a chronological history of the district (honors, previous cuts, etc.), and develop a "dream list" for the program development.

- The Status Report/Proposal to save the program must be developed.

- Informational meetings are held with music boosters to empower and mobilize them. The process to save music must become theirs to be successful.

- The music booster leadership team is selected, presented the Status Report, and prepared to present it to the board and/or administration.

3. Do we need a consultant present when fighting to save our music program?

About 55% of the victories occurred where teachers and parents have received assistance over the telephone, attended training seminars, and/or used the MENC *Action Kit*.

The advantage of having a consultant

present lies in his experience with the broad range of related issues present in a school district financial crisis. He also provides new perspectives without emotional involvement.

4. Can teachers fight the cuts and win—ALONE?

Sometimes they can and do. Usually, however, they are perceived by the school board and administration to be in conflict of interest or, worse, insubordinate.

5. Why is parent involvement important?

Parents are recognized by the school board and administration as the real "bosses." A financial crisis usually focuses on adult issues. The presence of a parent (taxpayer) provides accountability for student centered decision making.

6. Is the battle to save music programs more political than economic?

Probably. Any recommendation to "cut music first" demonstrates the predominate political and/or philosophical position, particularly when cuts are inequitable. A financial crisis exposes actual underlying administrative priorities, which may have been previously unstated or which may come from an administrator who always appeared to be supportive.

7. What if there isn't the large number of student participants to justify the reverse economic arguments?

The main "press" on the reverse economic concept has been emphasizing the cost advantage of the music program with large numbers of student participants.

One of the key elements of the reverse economic argument is its ability to expose factors such as scheduling, uncooperative guidance counselors or administrators, and middle school issues, which inhibit student participation in music. When student enrollment is low, we use the reverse economic analysis to show a district how much money they have lost and could regain by facilitating program growth.

The analysis process points out those factors which are detrimental to the health of a music program. In several cases, we have actually been able to stimulate increases in staffing during a financial crisis. ■