



**A bimonthly report on efforts to save music education programs**

### *The Power of being Proactive*

**P**roactive. It's a term that's become quite popular—and some would argue overused—throughout the last decade. But in the case of saving school music programs, being proactive can mean the difference between failure and success. But how do school music dealers know if their school music programs and supporters are 'proactive'? According to John Benham, founder of Music in World Cultures, you can tell by looking for the three primary criteria outlined below.

• **Does your district have a unified teacher constituency?** "It's important for all of the music teachers to perceive themselves as unified and to act unified," explains Benham. "I tend to find band teachers, orchestra teachers, choir teachers, and general music teachers rather than a unified music education corps. Sometimes I think it's because we've become very competitive—we'll accept cuts in someone else's program but not ours."

• **Is there a written curriculum that's specific, achievable, and measurable?** As mentioned in last month's article, having written standards that are specific, measurable, and achievable is critical to saving music programs, but there must also be a system of assessment in place. "Without that, there's no way to tell if you've accomplished anything," explains Benham. "Even more impor-

tantly, administrators will be able to see the curriculum in writing and know that what you're doing is legitimately being accomplished."

• **Are parents empowered via a unified arts and/or music coalition?**

According to Benham, the most important criteria is the existence of a parent/community music coalition. "We've never lost a case in which there was an active citizenry or music coalition," he explains, noting that such coalitions should include parents as well as non-parents and other interested community members. Ideally, there should also be a minimum of four committees within the coalition. These include:

1.) *Communications.* This committee activates and manages the music coalition, and also develops and maintains a mailing list and telephone bank. Its members may also publish a community music newsletter.

2.) *Administrative liaison.* This "spy network," as Benham refers to it, is responsible for keeping up to date on the goings-on and policy issues related to each school in the district. "You have to have someone in every school who is aware of everything that's happening in that particular school, whether it's by serving on a site-based management team or working regularly with the PTA or other organizational system." The committee should also have at least one member at every school board meeting who is identified as a 'music coalition administrative liaison.' "This intimidates the socks off [the board members] because they don't know how many thousands of people you're representing, and it provides accountability for communication and collaboration in the decision-making process," notes Benham. This committee also recruits, supports, and helps elect school board members and legislators who are supportive of music

and arts programs.

3.) *Statistics and finance.* Every booster organization or community coalition should maintain certain statistical data to demonstrate its program's health. Benham admits that very few districts actually know how many students are enrolled in their band, choir, or orchestra programs. "How can you demonstrate the strength of your program if you don't have that basic information?" he says. This committee also manages fundraising efforts and also works with the liaison committee to develop proposals specifically related to budgeting.

• *Philosophy and curriculum.* This group assists in developing the philosophy for the arts program and policy. "We tend to rely on legislators to determine policies for us, and it doesn't work," explains Benham.

According to Benham, if you find evidence of these components in your district, then chances are good that your area's being proactive. If, however, the criteria mentioned above don't sound too familiar, it may be time to rally the appropriate troops into action. "Music dealers need to always be working behind the scenes, because even if they are band parents, there appears to be a conflict of interest if they're involved in leadership," explains Benham. "But they can serve as wonderful resources for mailing lists, for keeping parents informed of political issues, and for networking coalition members with other organizations and businesspeople in the community." Regardless of the extent to which dealers become involved, the important thing is that they do their part to encourage and support a proactive approach to safeguarding school music programs in their communities.

*If you have any questions about information presented in this series, please contact John Benham at (612) 446-4246.*