

# FACING MUSIC CUTS? DON'T GIVE UP -- ORGANIZE!

By John Benham



Can your school afford to lose its music program? Probably not, but you may need to develop a strong fiscal argument to prove it to your administration and school board.

## PHILOSOPHICAL VS. FISCAL ISSUES

While philosophical issues based on solid educational reasoning have traditionally provided teachers and parents with their rationale for maintaining school music programs, today's financial crisis dictates a need to demonstrate the cost-efficiency of music programs to those making the cuts.

The secret of winning that case lies in the fiscal reality that music is curricular, i.e., it is held during the school day. If we were extra-curricular (held outside the school day) money could be saved by the legal possibility of sending students home. However, no money is saved by cutting music since the students must still be put in a classroom, normally one with a smaller (more costly) student-faculty ratio.

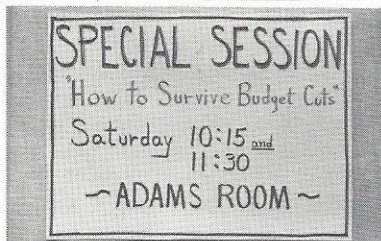
Your student load therefore becomes the key issue!

## FINANCIAL REALITY

The most expensive programs are those which are extra-curricular and those with the lowest student-faculty ratios. If your average student loads in music are below those of other classroom teachers you will need to develop a strong philosophical case!

## EQUAL CUTS

If your average student loads are equal to those of other classroom teachers you are financially justified fighting to take only your fair share



of cuts. Political expediency seems to indicate that you expect equal cuts if for no other reason than being able to be the first to ask for program re-instatement as funds become available in the future.

## REVERSE ECONOMICS

Normally a music teacher's student load is larger than that of the classroom teacher, and this is where our value is economically most secure. Any cuts in music under these circumstances become "reverse economics." Several observations may be made from the following example.

Average student load  
(regular teacher) = 150

Average student load  
(music teacher) = 200

1. If one music teacher is fired 1.33 teachers will have to be hired (maintained) to cover the same number of students in smaller classes.

2. Three music teachers under these conditions actually handle the equivalent of four teachers loads. -- This may be interpreted to pay for one elementary position. (These positions are normally "pull-out" programs.) -- If three music teachers are fired, four others will be needed to cover the same students in other classes. Do you begin to see the "reverse economics?"

3. Statistics indicate that elimination of elementary general, vocal or instrumental music leads to a 65-70% reduction in participation at the secondary levels. Those students will then need to be taught in small, expensive classes when they enter junior high school.

4. There is a danger here! Once your administration realizes the economy of large music classes, the attempt will be made to cancel your group lesson and ensemble programs and fill your load with large group instruction. Small group lessons are essentially free to the district if you handle your 200 students in 3 or 4 large groups. Further, statistics show that attrition in excess of 50% may be expected when small group lessons are not provided at the secondary level, putting more students right back in those expensive small classes.

## GETTING ORGANIZED

Teachers must organize themselves to provide leadership to the community and administration for saving music. Some suggestions include: (1) Develop a unified structure for leadership between teaching areas; (2) Adopt a written integrated curriculum for K-12 music; and (3) Purchase a copy of "Arts Education and Brain Research," Thomas Regelski (MENC).

Teachers must organize the public through selection of key parents in each school. Work together with them in the formation of a music parent communications network and a strategies committee to develop fiscal arguments so that parents can lead the battle to save

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## **MUSIC CUTS-ORGANIZE...**

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your program. (When parents lead the battle the image appears student-centered; when teachers lead it tends to appear job-centered.)

### **MOSTLY DO'S**

1. Get organized now and work together.
2. Music is curricular
  - Develop a written integrated K-12 curriculum.
  - Develop written philosophical and financial statements.
3. Adopt priorities consistent with the issues.
  - Save money
  - Save program integrity
  - Save students opportunities
  - Save teachers jobs
4. Challenge administrative authority.
  - The School Board is the parents representative, and the parents have a voting right to demand "student-centered" decisions.
  - Learn administrative vocabulary and budgetary processes. Check every statistic and develop with own to prove the financial efficiency of your program.
5. Get involved in the process of avoiding cuts.
  - Negotiate for a contract statement that specialists shall be cut at no greater ratio than other staff.
  - Establish maximum loads for music teachers.
6. Be prepared to compromise.
7. Keep informed.
  - Have a representative at all board meetings.
  - Operate openly with the administration and board.
  - Watch out for administrative games, e.g., confusing the registration process and impacting teaching schedules.

### **SOME DON'TS**

1. Don't suggest cuts within your program, but provide impact statements for every potential decision in order to maintain program integrity (balance).

2. Don't resort to name-calling, threats or resignations. That only helps them decide what to cut.

3. Don't become involved in a music vs. athletics battle. It tends to weaken your case as a curricular entity.

4. Avoid emotional tricks which tend to negate the factual integrity of your presentation.

5. Don't give up unless you too think music is a frill!