

SupportMusic  
Community  
Action Kit

**NAMM**<sup>®</sup>  
believe in music

# Grassroots Advocacy Guide



ADAPTED FOR  
CANADA BY THE

 **music makes us**<sup>®</sup>  
coalition for music education

“Opening my trumpet case for the first time, I didn’t know that I was actually opening a door to other things...”

STUDENT,  
AGE 13

**“Music education demonstrably improves academic achievement, behaviour and attitude. Through music kids learn how to have constructive relationships with other people, how focus counts, how application produces results, how to dream and most of all, how to feel true joy.”**

—BOB EZRIN,  
LEGENDARY PRODUCER  
2004 CANADIAN  
MUSIC HALL OF FAME  
INDUCTEE

## **Let Your Voice Be Heard!**

**Build community support for music education in schools**



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# 1 Turn Your Passion for Music into Action for Music Education!

**L**earning music helps young people do better in school and in life. Research tells us that students active in school music programs are more successful; students say their commitment to music keeps them focused and motivated in everything they pursue.

Music is basic to our development and expression, a disciplined endeavour valued by most cultures of the world. With the value of music education understood by so many and well-substantiated by research, why do we need to defend it?

Music and arts education programs are being reduced or cut in public schools. Reasons include: competition for instructional time, shortage of qualified teachers, lack of community support and the diversion of school funds to educational areas that are evaluated by standardized tests.

## **Turn your passion for music into citizen action for music education.**

As a parent, a community member or a business owner, your voice must be heard to influence school budget and curriculum decisions to assure all children have access to music education.

This booklet helps parents and community members influence support for — and access to — music education in schools. It will guide you in communicating with school board members and administrators, who are the decision-makers for every local district and who are influenced by the interests of the local population. It will also guide you to activities and resources for music education advocacy on provincial and federal levels as part of national music education advocacy efforts.

Advocating for music education is not complicated; the information provided in this booklet can get you started. The booklet can help you share the news of music's positive impact on learning before cuts to your community's music education programs begin. It can also help you counteract proposed cutbacks that affect access for children. Adapt these materials to your local situation, and use them in your day-to-day efforts. Become a music advocate, and help ensure a high-quality education for all our children.

## 2 Put Students at the Centre of Your Advocacy Effort

**Y**ou've heard this story before: a child arrives home with the news that his favourite school music program is being cut from the academic schedule. Some or all of this core educational opportunity may be eliminated at the next school board meeting.

For parents and active community members, this is alarming news, since you already know that participation in curricular music programs is vital to a young person's academic and social development. Research findings substantiate what many people know intuitively — young people who study music do better in school and in life. Any reduction in time or funding for a curricular music program will limit student access to a complete education, whether the cuts affect elementary teaching positions, the start of a planned new guitar or recording-technology lab or instruments needed for an expanding instrumental program.

How many students will be affected by this program cut? Are any other community members concerned? What can we do to influence the final decision for our children's sake? When these questions come to mind, you're on your way to becoming an effective music education advocate on behalf of the young people in your area.

Simply stated, cuts to music education negatively affect a student's potential to learn through participation in music programs. Cuts often happen in schools that have been charged with raising test scores in reading and math (even in those with long-term successful music programs), and without the parents and the wider community being advised beforehand.

**After-school music and visiting artist programs are wonderful sources of enrichment for students but they don't replace the learning gained from the study of music through a sequential, standards-based curricular program in school.**

You can work with other like-minded individuals to ensure that music education programs continue and flourish. You can get involved when you first hear of decisions that may interfere with young people's access to music education, and defend students' rights to a complete education that includes music and arts education all year long.

## THE KEY: PUT STUDENTS AT THE CENTER

Music advocacy is most effective when it is an ongoing, proactive and positive community activity; when it involves students, parents, community and school leaders; and when it is focused on students and learning, not on adult issues. Advocacy should be about the best interests of the students, rather than about conflict and power between the school board and the community, or about teachers' job conditions, pay or benefits. Every decision should be prefaced with the question "What will the long-term effects be on our students?" Advocacy needs to be proactive and collaborative — communities are most successful when they work in partnership with music teachers and administrators to make sure official policy includes curricular music standards.

Effective music education advocacy is focused on music for students — all students. Your defense of music education needs to be based on the belief that making music is essential to learning, to the enjoyment of life and to the preservation of culture. As an advocate for music education, you are part of a long and proud tradition of putting students first. Turn your passion for music education, and that of those around you, into a forceful voice in support of music education. Become a music education advocate and help keep the focus on what's most important: a high-quality education that helps students develop the skills they need to succeed in school and in life.



# 3 Activate Your Community: Form a Local Coalition

**A**n effective local coalition can promote the benefits of music education and the local programs' impact on student success. It assures that your school district adequately funds music education and holds school leadership accountable for student-centered decisions that maintain music education as a core curricular subject in your schools.

Ideally, your coalition is active when the music program is strong and visible to the community. The coalition can include:

- Community leaders, parents, business leaders, music store owners or music products manufacturers, symphony leaders and other music people in your community, region or province
- PTA, Guide and Scout troop leaders, other local merchants, religious leaders, youth development and after-school program leadership.

## TIP:

CHECK WITH YOUR NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL MUSIC EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS (FOUND AT [WWW.CMEA.CA](http://WWW.CMEA.CA)), AND INVOLVE NATIONAL/PROVINCIAL NETWORKS AND MUSIC EDUCATION FACULTY FROM LOCAL OR REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES.

## BRING TOGETHER POTENTIAL ADVOCATES

Anyone can hold a planning meeting to discuss issues related to music education in the community. When you do this, remember to invite:

- District music teachers and concerned parents, and discuss local music education needs
- Members of the school board and school administrators.

This group can serve as a task force before convening a larger group of supporters.

Establish communication with key members of your local advocacy group via an e-mail list. Together, note which community contacts may be helpful to your efforts, now and in the future.

The coalition's first task is to learn about the annual cycle of budget decision-making in your school or district. If your program is well-



supported and the budget is currently stable, sustain support for the program by making it as visible as possible in local media; consider a communications effort that regularly informs and inspires local and provincial media on the program's success.

You can also give an informational presentation to school board members to make them aware of the latest research findings about music. This is another way to emphasize the importance of music education to school leadership.

And you can educate coalition and community members about the financial impact of music education programs on school budgets.

### A LOCAL ACTION PLAN: YEAR-ROUND INVOLVEMENT

During the year, spread the word about your advocacy group's mission and action plan. Elect school board candidates who understand and support music in school, learn about the budget, participate in budget hearings, and publicize student involvement in the arts as well as research findings about music's effect on student learning.

ADVOCACY IS NOT FUND-RAISING. COMMUNITY FUND-RAISING FOR MUSIC EDUCATION CAN PROVIDE GENEROUS OUTREACH AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES. THIS FUNDING SHOULD SUPPLEMENT, NOT REPLACE, SCHOOL FINANCING OF QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT THAT BENEFITS ALL CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY. MUSIC EDUCATION ADVOCACY MUST WORK FOR ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR EDUCATION AND A COMPLETE AND HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION THAT INCLUDES MUSIC.

Please  
NOTE:



## ADVANCE THE CAUSE TOGETHER

Committees can provide ongoing monitoring and information about issues that can affect access to music education and can help coalition implementation. Consider forming:

- An executive committee or task force that coordinates coalition efforts and is a balanced representation of all parts of the music program — band, choir, orchestra, general music (K-12) and other music instruction
- Operating committees that cover public relations, administration, school board and music department relations.

## A STRONG LOCAL MUSIC EDUCATION COALITION

- REMINDS itself, and others, that students are at the centre of the issues and decision-making processes
- CONTINUOUSLY promotes a comprehensive, sequential and standards-based music education, including band, choir, orchestra, general music, guitar lab, recording studio or other individual genre or ensemble formats
- REMINDS everyone of music's role in improving the quality of life for students and the wider community
- DISCUSSES and promotes the right of every child to have access to a complete education, one that includes music and arts education throughout the entire school district
- CELEBRATES music's impact on learning throughout the lifespan and offers opportunities for community members to get involved in supporting and participating in school music programs
- MONITORS local and national activities that can strengthen the case for music education and participates in larger initiatives when needed (visit [www.musicmakesus.ca](http://www.musicmakesus.ca) and [www.SupportMusic.com](http://www.SupportMusic.com))
- PRESENTS the benefits of music education to your school board!

Your coalition should not micromanage the music curriculum, teachers or any particular component within the curriculum but should serve as an entity of support and advocacy.

When it is necessary to defend a music education program, act quickly! If you don't act quickly, with urgent concern, it sends a message that decisions to cut or reduce a music program are of marginal concern to the community. As soon as you learn of potential cuts to the music program, call together an ad hoc coalition of parents, business leaders and other influential members of the community, and make your concerns heard by school officials. One concerned individual can quickly coordinate communications between influential leaders and bring everyone together to express shared concerns at a school board meeting.

The democratic process allows for collective, organized citizen action. Many organizations form at the grassroots and national levels and use a variety of tactics to make their voices heard. Remember also that e-mail campaigns to your local school board members at a moment of crisis can get their attention.



# 4 Focus on School Leadership

**C**ommunities elect school board members to represent them wisely in the running of the school district. These leaders are motivated to create successful learning opportunities for children; many are sensitive to public opinion and appreciate knowing what's on your mind. As a voter, you have an opportunity to tell them how you feel about the importance of music in your children's education.

As a part of a year-round music education advocacy effort directed at school leadership, you can:

- Make a presentation on the benefits of music study
- Send each member a "Music is Key" brochure
- Attend meetings to learn about district issues
- Invite school board members to attend a music class, rehearsal or performance
- Request that updates regarding the district's music education program be put on the agenda at periodic school board meetings
- Bring students to perform at meetings where school board members are present
- Recognize and thank proactive board members who support music education.

## REQUEST A MEETING WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD

Has your school board heard the latest information from the research community on the benefits of music education?

- Send a letter requesting the opportunity to present outcomes-based evidence of the value of music education at a school board meeting
- Follow up with a phone call to the board secretary; know that it may take time to secure a place on the agenda
- Adapt the "Music is Key" PowerPoint presentation from the resource section in [www.musicmakesus.ca](http://www.musicmakesus.ca)

## GET THE WORD OUT

Once you've confirmed a date for making your presentation to the school board, notify your coalition of the event. Bring coalition members along to answer questions and to get to know school board members. If the meeting is in reaction to a potential cut to the music program, bring as many advocates as possible and keep the mood positive.

Prior to the presentation, send local media specific notice of your school board presentation via **press release** for placement in community calendars and other event listings. This will notify the public and the press of the specific time and place they can hear the arguments for music and arts education research for themselves.

A few days before the meeting, fax or e-mail a **media alert** addressed to the "Assignment Editor," to print and broadcast media in your area. This is a specific announcement to the press requesting that they cover the meeting and your presentation; this editor will usually determine which journalist will be sent to cover the event. Note: Radio and TV typically schedule coverage at the last minute.



### TIP:

CONFIRM ALL TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD SECRETARY EARLY IN YOUR PREPARATION. BE READY TO BRING YOUR OWN LAPTOP COMPUTER IF NECESSARY, AND BE SURE TO PREPARE HANDOUTS OF THE PRESENTATION SLIDES.

## PRESENTATION DAY

Review and practice the presentation with slides and notes. Prepare handouts; bring extra copies of the "Music is Key" brochure, the press releases you've sent, presentation slides and handouts featuring key research indicating the value of music education for students. Arrive early, set up before the meeting begins. Use personal conviction and good humour to deliver this important information to your school board. Be respectful of the board's time limits and promise to follow up if they request more information. If members of the media attend, keep your information positive and evidence-based as to why music study is important to a complete education. For regularly updated information, go to **[www.musicmakesus.ca](http://www.musicmakesus.ca)** and **[www.SupportMusic.com](http://www.SupportMusic.com)**

# 6

## WAYS TO DANCE WITH YOUR SCHOOL BOARD

- ALWAYS keep the big picture in mind and look at the comprehensive needs of children within that context – you can be sure your school board has many other priorities on their agenda and it's important to respect and acknowledge that fact.
- TAKE a long-term perspective. Survival of the music program may require dollars right now but in the long run, we really need to overhaul education financing.
- KNOW where the power lies and keep your focus on issues that are relevant to your audience. For example, talk with your school board members about the need for certified music teachers, not local funding priorities.
- BE AWARE of windows of opportunity because timing really does matter. New research, focused on quality and equity provide opportunities to illustrate your music program's essential role in providing excellence in education and equitable access for all students.
- BE A PROACTIVE guardian of quality programs. You can do this by protecting the space for music instruction, assuring that certified teachers are respected and compensated for their professional expertise, and by advocating for a sequential, standards-based curriculum. Never try to replace a school program with an outside program.
- AND FINALLY, always place the well-being of children at the centre of every advocacy effort, and don't settle for merely raising test scores.

*Adapted from a recent article by Joan Schmidt, past president, National School Boards Association.*

# 5 Identify Legislative Priorities

**E**ducation policy at the local community level is currently subject to guidelines and incentives — financial and other — developed by provincial and local governments. Diverse arts education mandates therefore exist between communities and provinces.

## LOCAL

Local control and discretion presents an opportunity to influence local policy to support music education. Community-based advocacy efforts sustain support for music education and can also influence policies that require funding for music education. National-level campaigns, such as Music Monday, see [www.musicmakesus.ca](http://www.musicmakesus.ca), help advance awareness as well as mobilize local support for music education.

Advocacy efforts must also address updates in district policy to assure equity and access to music education as part of learning from early grades through graduation, including:

- Specified contact time in elementary grades for music education offered by certified teachers
- Specified program availability to include elective instrumental instruction in elementary, middle school and secondary grades
- Middle school curriculum requirements in the visual and performing arts
- Graduation requirements in the visual and performing arts.

## PROVINCIAL

Policy development for arts education does and can set requirements for all schools in a particular province. These requirements vary widely.

Many provinces have arts education coordinators who work in the provincial education department. Arts education coordinators can provide your coalition with additional information about policy development for arts education. When provincial arts education policy reform is a goal in your

community, mobilize parents throughout the province to address specific policy development needs. This effort takes time and consistent effort, but keep in mind that you are working for a better education for all children in your province.

Your provincial music education association (found at [www.cmea.ca](http://www.cmea.ca)) can provide up-to-date information on policy reform.

As you can see, the voices of music education advocates are important at every level of policy development. Let YOUR voice be heard.



# 6 Publicize and Promote Your Program

A regular flow of positive, celebratory news on your school's music education program proactively defends ongoing and adequate support of that program in your community. You do not need to be a public relations or communications professional to use these tools. If one of your school music education coalition members has knowledge of media relations, you can ask him or her to assist — your music education advocacy effort will be richer with this person's input and direction.

Please  
NOTE:

PUBLIC AND MEDIA RELATIONS ACTIVITIES ARE CRUCIAL WHEN A MUSIC PROGRAM IS THREATENED. BEFORE A CRISIS, DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL MEDIA, PROVIDING CONSISTENT AND POSITIVE NEWS ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY'S MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAM.

## THE STORY – CELEBRATE STUDENT LEARNING IN MUSIC

Whenever children participate in musical learning activities, there is an important story to share with the community. *Music Monday* ([www.musicmonday.ca](http://www.musicmonday.ca)) is an annual celebration of music education you can support and get involved in. The following are additional story ideas:

- Children participating in age-appropriate classroom music education
- Student concerts that demonstrate student achievement
- Artist-in-Residence programs featuring partnerships with local cultural organizations
- Visits to an elementary school by older music students, inviting and inspiring them to participate in the district's music programs
- Parental participation in school music activities; parent-child participation in school music ensembles
- Community service programs: e.g., performing at nursing homes
- Announcements of student or ensemble awards



- Individual student stories: e.g., the role music played in a student's ability to overcome difficulties
- Celebrating the community's musical family: profiles of teachers and administrators involved with music

## TELLING THE STORY — WHO WILL LISTEN?

**1** Telling the story of music education's benefits to students to even one member of the media is important; telling it to many more, through communications networks in your community, magnifies the reach of the message. Members of the media are already paying attention to school district newsletters and Web sites, which are aimed at parents. Provide regular updated information about school music activities to the coordinators of those outlets — suggest and provide ongoing information for a music education information column or Web portal.

**2** Organize a list — start small and then expand — of local media contacts for city/town newsletters, newspapers and radio and television stations. Contact these outlets regularly about school music education events and programs. Request contact information for education, cultural or community editors and reporters, and regularly send them all music education communications produced by your group.

## HOW TO TELL THE STORY

Media outreach should be continuous throughout the school year and can take a variety of formats.

### ● Set Up the Story – Media Alerts

A media alert announces a specific event; its purpose is to solicit coverage from the media. A two or three-week lead time is suggested to assure placement in community calendars. Follow-up phone calls to editors the week of the event can result in reporters or editors attending the event, and your event receiving media coverage.

### ● Tell the Story – Press Releases and Feature Story Solicitation

A press release provides a thorough overview of a music education event or program. It has all the information included in a media alert but it also provides more program content and background, including student, teacher and/or artist residency profiles. Submitting a series of press

releases provides the media with more complete information about a school's music program.

### ●Celebrate the Story – Photo and Caption Placement

A picture is worth a thousand words. Digital photos from school music education events, along with identifying captions, can be sent via e-mail to local media and communications networks (school, district, music department Web site, etc.). Determine who should receive the photo — usually the same people you send your media alerts and press releases to, and photo size and pixel requirements they prefer for publication. Select a lively and interesting music-making photo, and write a caption for it. Send to your list of media members via e-mail. Tip: Be sure to secure permission from parents or guardians of minor children before you send the photo to the media; identify photo subjects from left to right. State the facts about the event, and include other school music facts, if desired.

●Look through the *Music Monday* promotion toolkit at [www.musicmonday.ca](http://www.musicmonday.ca) for more ideas and key messages to advance the story of music education.

### ●When the Going Gets Tough — Program or Budget Cutbacks

The effort involved in establishing and working with a communications network will pay off if the music education program is threatened with program or budget cutbacks. If a program is threatened, it is important that you let the media know that a large number of people in the community are concerned and engaged in specific actions to reinforce the importance of music in the education of their children. The same tactics — media alerts, releases, and photos and captions — can be used during the crisis or defensive period but with different themes. Alert parents to organizing advocacy meetings with media alerts, provide background or specifics about program cuts with press releases, and follow up specific parent advocacy activities with photos and captions.

In these situations, consider Letters to the Editor and Editorial Board meetings.



# 7 Final Thoughts on Effective Advocacy

- **KEEP** students at the centre. School administrators work through complex issues every day. Help them stay focused on student welfare.
- **KNOW** that you can make a difference. It's been said that 10 letters to a public official or decision-maker will put issues on their radar screen, 25 letters will make them explore the issue, and 50 letters can change a vote. Understand and use this knowledge to your benefit. Organize a letter-writing or e-mail campaign as soon as you become aware of an issue and have developed a position.
- **CONNECT** with business. Ask the business community to support and arrange student performances or exhibitions in the workplace. Offer to inform them of the impact of music on learning.
- **SHOWCASE** student achievement for parents and the community through concerts, performances and exhibitions whenever possible. Schedule regular student performances at school board meetings. Include the information in this kit in concert programs to create awareness of the educational and developmental benefits of studying music.
- **STRIVE** for equity. Work to ensure that your school district provides equal opportunities for arts education for all children.
- **PREPARE** arguments carefully. Music belongs in the core curriculum. Learn how time and funding decisions are made to help you reason with school officials. Understand the pressures the school board is under and the tough decisions it has to make. Attend meetings regularly, and report back to your group. Remain professional, poised and positive in your work with school and community leadership.
- **GET TO KNOW** school board members. All board members are potential allies. Work to help re-elect school board members who understand the importance of music and arts education. Encourage

music advocates to run for office. Encourage them to experience the results of their support — invite them to student performances, and introduce them to the audience. If appropriate, ask them to say a few words. Thank them for their interest in student achievement through music.

- **DON'T ARGUE** against another program. Show that you are willing to work for the good of all students. Keep the discussion centered on students, not teacher-job centered.
- **BECOME** a source of solid information. Local board members appreciate your help in bringing them new information on music education's vital role in life and learning. Use credible data to build trust.
- **ANTICIPATE** potential budget or schedule cuts. Should you hear of potential cuts and meetings in which those sorts of decisions could be made:
  - Have articulate and informed members of your group poised to talk to community groups, to visit school decision-makers and to speak at meetings
  - Make a “preemptive” presentation about the value of music during a noncrisis period
  - Make your views clear prior to major meetings through brief, polite and focused calls, letters and e-mails.
- **THANK** administrators and board members for their positive comments and support. Thank even those who did not vote with you; there will be other battles.
- **STAY INFORMED** of the latest music advocacy information. Links to more than 100 advocacy organizations can be found at [www.musicmakesus.ca](http://www.musicmakesus.ca) and [www.SupportMusic.com](http://www.SupportMusic.com).
- **PARTICIPATE** in advocacy events like *Music Monday*.
- **BECOME** a signatory to The National Effort to support quality music education and urge others to add their “voice” at [www.musicmakesus.ca](http://www.musicmakesus.ca).

# 8 Coalition for Music Education in Canada: Web site Advocacy Tools

## 1. PowerPoint Presentations:

- a. Introduction to the Coalition for Music Education in Canada
- b. Music is Key – in Learning and in Life (an overview of research and testimonials)

**2. Publications:** A variety of publications and brochures that can be downloaded or ordered from the Coalition office including curriculum guidelines, resource guide for elementary teachers, DVDs, parent-directed brochures and administrator-directed brochures (Music is Key).

**3. State of Music Education in Canada:** Benchmark Study 2005

**4. Pan-Canadian Symposium E-Book from 2005 Conference** (hosted by the Canadian Music Educators Association)

**5. Music Monday:** An annual celebration on the first Monday of every May uniting hundreds of thousands of students, teachers, parents and music-lovers across Canada in a nation-wide simultaneous concert that celebrates the importance of music in our lives and in our schools. On *Music Monday*, schools and communities from coast-to-coast-to-coast perform the same song at the exact same time galvanizing the country through song and performance.

**6. Champions for Music Education:** Forty 30-second radio public service announcements supporting the need to keep music in our schools

**7. The National Effort:** An online effort that invites signatories in support of quality music education in our schools. Join the thousands who have already added their names. Both individuals and organizations can become signatories.

**8. Holiday Tuba Festival:** Download arrangements for tubas and

euphoniums and join a special holiday celebration by students and professionals across the country during the first week of each December.

### 9. Research Links:

Browse our research links to studies and articles from across North America

### 10. Online Shopping:

Order brochures and other resources on our secure site. Membership and donations also accepted here.

For further tools, **[www.SupportMusic.com](http://www.SupportMusic.com)** is a valuable U.S.-based resource that can help you build your case to protect and promote school music programs.



**“With music, I feel complete. It reminds me that humans possess genius and can use it to create beauty. Music classes in our schools can unlock the doors to creativity and self expression for Canada’s young people and help them expand their horizons.”**

—DR. MARC GARNEAU, FORMER HEAD OF THE CANADIAN SPACE AGENCY AND THE FIRST CANADIAN ASTRONAUT IN SPACE

“Music helps me learn better because it sets off a mood that allows me to relax. Music lets my imagination flow and lets me think clearly”

GRADE 3  
STUDENT,  
MARKHAM, ON



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