

# HOMETOWN ADVOCACY



## The Power of Togetherness

WMEA Advocacy Strategy

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Having positive working relationships with colleagues can make everyone's efforts more powerful, encouraging and supportive. There can be times when music educators assigned to various courses at a school (or in a district) might find themselves at odds with one another about a variety of workplace issues. In this WMEA Advocacy Strategy, music educators can explore ways to have healthy work relationships so everyone can both celebrate the successes and support one another in the challenges.

Here are suggestions for creating a sense of "togetherness" among a school district's music educators:

- Set aside time to meet as a team to share goals, ideas, plans.
- Attend each other's events as a show of support to colleagues, as a demonstration to students that you find value in what they are doing, and as a demonstration to the community that you are part of a team.
- Set aside time in meetings to discuss the WHY of what students are experiencing in your music classrooms.
- Work together to agree on pedagogy, terminology, grading and assessment, and so on. Students can sense when all the educators are agreeing on terminology (such as a counting system), grading and/or a philosophy of what is important and why. Having one synchronized approach demonstrates thoughtfulness and coordination from the professionals. At meetings to work out these kinds of details, everyone agrees to listen more than talk!
- Find time to meet with administrators to advocate for music education in your district. Have one big goal in mind and several strategies for how to make it happen in a way that strengthens music education without costing any other content area anything.
- Create social time, such as potluck department meetings, or have your booster organization sponsor a luncheon to kick off the year, or have music faculty and their families get together for a meal.
- Start meetings with a collaborative performance or engage all the teachers in an interactive music lesson, and they get to choose their instrument or voice.
- Host a faculty concert or cabaret event to feature the talents and the joy of music making. Perhaps a faculty ensemble could perform at a public event or concert.
- Make a point of celebrating the successes of your colleagues in public ways, if possible.
- Create models of positive communication that represent how your music educators want to message to others. Include how to message to colleagues, administrators, parents and the greater community.

- Ask colleagues about their professional goals and how those fit with their personal lives. Encourage them to grow!
- Create a path for how your group wants to resolve conflicts among yourselves if those were to happen.
  - Engage in courageous conversations with a trusted third person.
  - Find common teaching passions and shared philosophies.
  - Keep conversations student centered if relationships are very strained.
- Sit in on one another's classrooms to observe and reflect. Schedule time for conversation afterward.
- Celebrate personal and professional achievements as a team.

#### Two Examples:

- Encourage colleagues to meet together and maybe pick up an instrument that they have never played before to "break the ice" and then share ideas of past performances that they have had students engage in. One of the directors in our middle school had their principal join them at a concert to play the triangle (the principal had never played an instrument). The students really liked this.
- Recruiting students to join ensembles can be a difficult task as colleagues can sometimes feel like they are competing with each other for participants. One option would be to make the school schedule work in a way that allows students to participate in every ensemble-based course they would like to. This often requires music educators to provide flexibility in allowing students to attend one ensemble on certain days and another on other days. Providing the chance for students to be in multiple ensembles will remove the pressure of recruiting "against" each other. Another technique that some schools use is to have all ensemble recruiting done at the same time where families learn about the value of music education and are shown all the ways students can be involved in a cooperative presentation.