

# Legislators

## MENC-Music for All Students: Planning Music Education Advocacy

Please note that when taking legislative action, this should be done using personal time and resources. As a school or state employee you may not use public resources to advocate your cause. This applies to the use of work e-mail, phone, photocopy machine, letterhead, etc.

### Local and State Legislators

It is critically important to build relationships with your legislators. The best way to start building that relationship is to invite your legislators to your concerts and offer them an opportunity to say a few words. That gives them an opportunity to showcase how they feel about education—particularly music education—to their voting constituents. Meetings in a legislator’s district office are another good way to check in with that legislator when the legislature is not meeting. It is also important that you become familiar with a legislator’s staff when possible. Legislative staffers are the eyes, ears, and researchers for the legislator. When you have a good relationship with those staffers, they are likely to consider you the expert and will call on you for your opinion which they will use to influence policy.

### Sample Advocacy Letter to State Legislator

Date

Honorable (Senator or Representative) \_\_\_\_\_,

Legislators Address

As a constituent and (music educator/parent/advocate), I am writing to request your support for music programs in Oregon schools. Strong music programs in our schools help our children and communities in real and substantial ways. The benefits of music education result in success in four areas—in school, in developing intelligence, in life, and in society.

- Music education develops better communication skills and cognitive skills useful in every part of the curriculum, which helps students find **success in school**.
- Research shows music study actively contributes to brain development; therefore, music education leads to **success in developing intelligence**.
- Music education brings countless psychological, emotional, and physical benefits contributing to **success in life**.
- Music education shapes individual abilities and character through decreasing use of all substances (alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs) and broadens students’ understanding and appreciation of the world around them, which leads to **success in society**.

Music education should consist of a full, balanced, sequential course of music instruction taught by qualified teachers. On behalf of the students, the schools, and the communities in your district, please join me in protecting and advancing opportunities for all children to receive a high-quality music education.

You, as one of our state legislators, have a role in protecting music education during these difficult financial times by proclaiming your support for music education in public schools. I hope I can count on your support.

Sincerely,  
(Sign your name)

Type Your Name Here

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

## Sample Proclamation for Government Officials

### WHEREAS

The study of music is basic to a complete education, provides a competitive edge for successful educational reform, engages students in individual and group activity, develops creativity, problem-solving capacity, and critical and evaluative skills; and

### WHEREAS

Music education helps students acquire skills in production and performance of music, as well as an understanding of history and culture; and

### WHEREAS

The Oregon Music Educators Association is concerned with maintaining and improving school music programs for all students regardless of their socioeconomic status or their abilities; therefore

### BE IT RESOLVED

That the Oregon legislature recognizes and commends the Oregon Music Educators Association for their concern for and efforts to enhance the quality of music education in Oregon schools;

### THEREFORE

I endorse strong music programs in public schools in my district and I encourage teachers, students, and citizens to actively support music education in Oregon.

Date:

Signature:

Title:

## Sample Meeting Request Letter to State Legislator

Date

Honorable (Senator or Representative) \_\_\_\_\_,

Legislators Address

On behalf of the music educators in your district, we would like to request a meeting with you on (Date and Time) to discuss the status of music education in our district. Attending the meeting will be \_\_\_\_\_ (name of the attendees, their titles and the organizations they represent.)

As you may know, strong music programs in our schools can help our kids and communities in real and substantial ways. The benefits of music education can be measured in four categories:

- Music education develops better communication skills and cognitive skills useful in every part of the curriculum, which helps students, find **success in school.**
- Research shows music study actively contributes to brain development; therefore, music education leads to **success in developing intelligence.**
- Music education brings countless psychological, emotional, and physical benefits contributing to **success in life.**

- Music education shapes individual abilities and character through decreasing use of all substances (alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs) and broadens students' understanding and appreciation of the world around them, which leads to **success in society**.

Please contact me at either (insert both day-time phone number and e-mail address) to confirm our appointment. We look forward to meeting with you to discuss this important part of every child's education.

Sincerely,  
(Sign your name)  
Type Your Name Here

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

## The Legislative Visit

The legislative visit is a very important tool for communicating with legislators. Legislative visits need not necessarily occur at the state capitol. Often the best time for a visit is in the district when the legislature is not meeting.

1. **A legislative visit might include 3–4 people, but generally not more than 4.** It is most effective if there are community supporters, booster parents, and fine arts activists joining a music educator on such a visit.
2. **Be on time and even early.** Lateness can be viewed as being unprepared.
3. **Explain** who you represent and why. Introduce everyone in your group.
4. **Use Talking Points** to plan out what message(s) you want to get across during your meeting. Talking points should be short (no more than a single page) and usually bulleted, so that main facts can easily be seen. It is usually important to restrict the talking points to a single issue. If you believe that more information is needed, provide it in a separate document that can accompany the talking points.
  - Be sure to refer to a bill number (if there is one).
  - State the organization's position on the issue (for or against).
  - Provide several points that support your position.
  - Offer to provide more information (via a Website [www.oregonmusic.org](http://www.oregonmusic.org) , phone number, e-mail, etc.).

### Resources: Sample Talking Points Academic Benefits of Music

- Students in music programs scored 57 points higher in the verbal portion, and 47 points higher in the math portion of the SATs than students with no arts participation.
- Students who participated in music programs receive more awards and academic honors.
- In schools with strong music classes, cases of low self-esteem, shyness, and school delinquency are decreased.
- Schools with strong music programs have better school attendance.
- Schools with strong music programs have higher graduation rates, especially for minority students.

### Challenges Facing Music Education

- The school funding crisis often becomes a music education crisis. Music positions cuts can mean decreased instruction time or even elimination of the music program. Music cuts do not save most school districts money in the long run!  
<http://www.oregonmusic.org/files/file/Music%20Cuts.pdf>
  - Music education classes often lack adequate funding.
  - Music teachers are given inadequate instruction time to properly teach students.
  - 94% of public schools have music programs; however, 57% receive an hour or less of instruction per week.
  - Music classes held in inappropriate spaces (cafeteria, closets, etc.) often can result in inadequate learning or no learning

Other helpful Talking Points can be found on the MENC Web site in a page called “Facts and Figures.” Access it at <http://www.menc.org/information/advocate/facts.html>. See “Sample Talking Points” in the Resource section.

5. **Practice** what each person will say before the meeting. Make sure each person says something.
6. **Get to the point.** The first person that speaks will set the tone and establish the atmosphere of the meeting. Be prepared with succinct answers to the members’ questions.
7. **Use personal anecdotes to illustrate your point.** Legislators will remember the anecdotes better than the facts. Too many statistics can be overwhelming.
8. **Be prepared** with your own information, and know the politics of the issues.
9. **Be factual and honest.** Don’t misstate or overstate your position. Building an honest relationship with the legislator is vital to future communication.
10. **Make your points without disparaging your opponents.** Trying to make your own situation look more important by criticizing others is one way to destroy your credibility.
11. **Listen carefully.** Listen to find out what factors are on the mind of the member, and try to respond to those concerns. Make sure you do not do all the talking.
12. **Provide** the legislator with a folder of information. The legislator needs to have accurate information available when issues affecting music education occur. A folder should consist of a few items that are presented in a condensed and easy-to-read format. Providing the legislator with pages and pages of information will be counterproductive, and he or she is unlikely to read everything. Contents could include:
  - Business Card. Be sure to include your business card so that the legislator or staffer can easily contact you in the future.
  - State or Local Fact Sheet. Your legislator is interested in what happens in your state, not necessarily the entire nation. Although some national statistics will be useful, it is best to keep things on a state/local level. Make sure they are an easy-to-read format—preferably bulleted.
  - List of local student performance dates and locations.
  - MENC Facts and Figures Brochure or MENC Statement of Principles. These can be found at [www.menc.org](http://www.menc.org).
  - Creative Industries Reports. These reports from Americans for the Arts detail the economic impact of the arts on each congressional district.
  - Critical Links. A publication from the Arts Education Partnership that examines the effects of arts learning on students’ social and academic skills.
13. **If a member doesn’t agree with you, don’t become argumentative.** It is also good to understand his or her position. You may wish to make the point that you represent a large number of constituents but do so politely.
14. **Be polite.** Never yell, threaten, or become overly argumentative. Don’t take the visit personally, and don’t hold a grudge.
15. **Follow up after the meeting.** Write a letter of thanks for the meeting that reiterates your position. Provide the legislator with more information if asked. Don’t forget to thank legislators who are in agreement with your position for their support.
16. **Continue** to build a relationship with members of your legislature. These are the people who will be in the position to help keep music education strong. An ongoing relationship can yield great benefits over time.

## Legislative Correspondence

There are a variety of ways to deliver your message to your legislator when you cannot be there in person. Emails, letters, faxes, and telephone calls are all widely used methods with advantages as well as disadvantages. Be sure to use the right type of correspondence for your situation.

**E-mails...** State the position in the subject line. In many cases, the body of an e-mail is not read, and if it is, only by an aide. Legislative staff does however, make note of the position and keeps an account of the subjects of positions. Many legislators will respond to your e-mails so that you know they have been received. Be sure to include your name and complete mailing address.

**PRO:** E-mail is an instant communication and can be used in emergency scenarios. E-mail is easy for grassroots supporters to send. Some legislative offices prefer e-mail communication.

**CON:** Some legislative offices disregard form e-mails. Some legislative offices completely disregard or discount e-mail.

**Letters and Faxes...** Launch a letter-writing campaign, but remember to keep it simple and easy for people to participate. Provide sample letters or talking points and addresses on your state MEA Website if possible. Letters are one of the most effective means of communicating a position, especially if they are from constituents.

**PRO:** Grassroots supporters can easily reproduce form letters and faxes. There is a paper record of your request for support or opposition.

**CON:** This method takes longer to generate numerous responses. There is a delay for any mailed letters. This could add weeks if your legislature screens its mail for security reasons. Some legislators look more favorably on personalized letters than form letters or faxes.

**Telephone Calls...** can have the most immediate impact. Be polite. Stay focused on your specific issues. Be direct and to the point. Legislators are very busy people; it may be difficult to speak directly to your legislator by phone. Be prepared to leave an informed detailed message with the legislative staff or a succinct voicemail explaining your concerns with your contact information.

**PRO:** It is possible that you will be able to speak to the legislator or the staffer and have an informed discussion on the subject. Enough calls can immobilize any office.

**CON:** There is no record of your contact with the legislator's office. Some offices do not keep track of phone calls to record support or opposition to an issue. Enough calls can immobilize any office.

## Sample Thank You Letter to State Legislator

Date

Honorable (Senator or Representative) \_\_\_\_\_,

Legislators Address

On behalf of the music educators in your district, we would like to thank you for your support. We thank you for adding your voice with other state legislators, school administrators, school board members, and others who have been strong advocates for music education.

As you already know, strong music programs in our schools help our children and communities in real and substantial ways. The benefits of music education result in success in four areas—in school, in developing intelligence, in life, and in society.

- Music education develops better communication skills and cognitive skills useful in every part of the curriculum, which helps students, find **success in school**.
- Research shows music study actively contributes to brain development therefore music education leads to **success in developing intelligence**.
- Music education brings countless psychological, emotional, and physical benefits contributing to success in life.
- Music education shapes individual abilities and character through decreasing use of all substances (alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs) and broadens students' understanding and appreciation of the world around them, which leads to **success in society**.

We commend you for your leadership and look forward to continuing to work with you on these important issues.

Sincerely,

(Sign your name)

Type Your Name Here

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

## Evaluate

Evaluating strategies and continuing music education advocacy activities are essential to keeping music education in school curriculum.

- Regularly collect data on music education in your state. Use this data to assess your current advocacy campaign and long-term strategic plan. Release findings to the public, perhaps at a media event.
- Analyze the legislative techniques that seem the most successful in your advocacy efforts. Fine-tune your strategy for further advocacy activities and keep at it!
- Review and analyze the status and role of music education. Could things be better? Are there music education programs in every school in your state? Are they funded adequately?
- Reevaluate advocacy assignments. If one person has too much responsibility, spread out the work so no one becomes burnt out. Advocacy is a constant and ongoing process. Be sure to match abilities with tasks.

## Maintain

Advocacy activities must be ongoing. Try planning a regular “Day in the Capitol,” participate in the national Arts Advocacy Day, or Music In Our Schools Month to continue visits to legislators, disseminate new information, and remain in the public eye through advocacy and other efforts.

1. **Stay informed.** New research is being conducted all the time. Keep abreast of new information by frequently reviewing music education Web sites, including MENC’s. Some of the information may make a difference when presented to a legislator at a future visit.
2. **Share information.** Send letters and e-mails or make phone calls to legislators when important new information develops. Share information with all MEA members so that principals, other administrators, and schools will receive the same information. This is a great way to get new teachers involved in advocacy.
3. **Maintain a standing committee.** Keep a committee for legislative advocacy active. Rotate new people onto the committee so that planning future events won’t be brand new every two years.
4. **Set dates.** Establish dates 2–3 years in advance (same time each year) for future “Day in the Capital” visits. This will help create a tradition of advocating for music education in your state. Dates should be publicized as much as possible to encourage more teachers to get involved.
5. **Continue building partnerships.** While it is essential to seek partnerships for any advocacy campaign, you should also work on those partnerships throughout the year. By learning from one another, we can combine efforts to achieve the most for students and education as a whole. Attend coalition or arts alliance meetings. Invite other groups to your state conference and attend other conferences. Offer to make a presentation on music education at other conferences.

## Testifying in Committee

Giving testimony in favor of or in opposition to a proposed bill is another opportunity to attempt to persuade legislators to your point of view. There are three benefits to making this effort:

1. You have the opportunity to give focused information to policymakers.
2. Your testimony is recorded in the history of that particular bill for others to read.
3. You have the opportunity to develop network relationships with other organizations that can lead to shared endeavors that may result in a favorable public policy change.

If you wish to testify, you can contact the sponsor of a bill that would benefit music education (arts education) and offer your testimony. That is simply a courtesy to the sponsoring legislator so they can attempt to orchestrate a cohesive chain of testimony that they hope will persuade the committee to favorable vote. If it is a bill you oppose, or if you simply wish to represent a point of view you can go to the committee hearing and sign up to testify.

Check your legislature’s Web site to learn when bills of interest will be heard in committee. When you testify, identify yourself, any organization you represent, whether you are asking for a favorable or unfavorable vote on the proposed legislation and then briefly state your most cogent arguments. It’s best to limit your remarks to three minutes or less. If you have heard testimony from a previous witness that you agree with, be sure to make reference to that agreement in your remarks.

**Adapted from MENC Music for All-Students; Planning Music Education Advocacy**