

THE PERFECT STORM - AN EDITORIAL BY BOB MORRISON

When we examine the history of the past waves of public school music program cuts, there existed either one (never both) of the following conditions:

1. Federal or State Budget Cuts - This occurred during the recession of the 70's that lead to the long decline of arts programs in our schools, especially hitting our major urban centers. Education funding makes up the majority of most state budgets in this country. Most states are required by law to manage a balanced budget and shortfall in revenue to the states is offset by budget cuts. Any budget cuts will usually impact education funding to local school districts forcing the real cuts to occur at the school level and we all know where they tend to look first: music and arts education.
2. Back to Basics Movement - This occurs when a movement of educational reform calls for a strong focus on "Basic" subjects. This definition of basics usually includes reading, math and science and nothing else (although we firmly believe and vehemently protect music and arts education as a basic, of equal importance to, and stature of, these other subjects!) This "back to basics movement" occurred in the late 80's and early 90's and caused great damage until the current wave of grass roots arts education advocacy (circa 1992) really took hold.

What has NEVER happened before in our history is the existence of both conditions simultaneously. The two issues are now converging to create what may be the greatest advocacy challenge that the music and arts education community has ever confronted. The Perfect Storm.

On the budget front a majority of states are now running budget deficits. Many of these states were ill prepared for the economic downturn and have recently made budget commitments, which were significantly under-funded. My favorite is the \$8 million scholarship program in Arizona, which has ballooned to \$800 million. Oops!) Cuts are being contemplated or made in several states NOW. These cuts could lead to the elimination of music programs in many communities.

As for the back to basics movement: we are now seeing local school officials who, because of the current state of intense focus on reading and math performance, refuse to put any resources into anything other than those areas where they will be immediately held accountable. It is the age-old theory of "Teaching to the Test." In Colorado, Utah and other states the fear of failing on blanket, standardized performance measures, has officials refusing to support the existence of music and arts programs. We can begin to see how the landscape is rapidly changing as the message from the federal government

stresses the need to improve reading and math performance and the legislative action demands that every child in grades three through eight be tested in these two subjects.

What you can do:

1. Get educated: Find out what is happening in your state and community. Use this information to galvanize others. Be proactive rather than reactive! Don't just assume that the status of music education in your community will stay status quo.
2. Fight back. Be sure to be educating your local community about the important role of music and arts education in school performance. After all, most schools that are at the top of the performance scale have robust music and arts programs while those at the bottom in most instances do not.
3. Do not take cuts at face value. Have parents and other concerned citizens continue to make the case about the importance of music in the schools and the role music plays in the overall development of a child.
4. Get Armed: Visit the VH1 Save The Music Web site (vh1savethemusic.com) for tools and materials to help you make the case about the importance of music programs.
5. Watch This Space: VH1 Save The Music is working with other national organizations to develop strategies to help counter this confluence of issues to limit the damage that could be caused.

By being informed we will be better prepared, as a community, to face the challenges that lie ahead. We hope the information provided will empower each of you to face the changing landscape that we will confront in the coming months.