

## **Centralized and Site Based Administration Systems**

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Your effectiveness as a music advocate will improve with greater insight into the centralized and site-based administration systems, two well-defined layers of school district management and responsibility.

This article describes the lines of authority between (and within) these two levels of power and offers a few pointers on how you can work within the systems established in your district.

When reading, keep in mind that management roles may vary greatly from district to district based upon state laws and student population size. For instance, in a small school district, all management responsibilities may be covered by only the central administration; in others, where there are several schools within a large district, the central administration may delegate increased responsibilities to individual school principals.

### **Central Management: The Hub of the Wheel**

In centralized management, levels of authority or responsibility are assigned by law or district policy to the chief executive of the school district. The chief executive, usually a superintendent, has various levels of support staff to assist him/her in day-to-day operations of the district. In descending order of authority, these support staff may include, among other personnel:

- Assistants
- Directors
- Supervisors
- Coordinators

Each position has a specific job description, level of authority and responsibility for evaluation of subordinate personnel. Keep in mind that the status of the music program is often directly related to the authority level of personnel in charge of that area. For example, if the music department is under the authority of a director, music programs may gain greater budgetary security than when placed under the authority of a lower-level coordinator.

### **The central administration is directly responsible to the Board of Education.**

The effectiveness of the operation of a school district is often directly related to the relationship between the board and superintendent. Contact with other members of the central administration will depend on the issue(s) being discussed and the management style of the superintendent. In my experience, the most effective administrators are highly skilled at staff evaluation and collaborative decision-making.

Giving power to the various levels of administrative decision-making does not remove the Board of Education's responsibility to ensure a music education for all children. The Board has the right and responsibility to establish policies such as "all children shall have equal access to a

music education in all grades." They may further define this policy to conform to community expectations.

### **The central administration is responsible for developing the district budget.**

The central administration also manages any line items in the budget that fall under its supervision. In a typical music program this includes any music teachers assigned as part of the negotiated teacher contract for release or "preparatory" time (e.g., elementary general music specialists), and itinerant teachers with multiple school assignments (e.g., elementary instrumental music). Itemized or publicized budget cuts to the music program normally only appear at the central administration level.

During the budgetary decision making process, the central administration establishes the staffing ratio. The staffing ratio relates directly to the number of teaching positions available to a single school site.

### **Site-based Management: The Local Layer of Authority**

Site administrators (principals) and supporting staff are responsible for decisions at individual schools in the district. The various levels of personnel are also provided with specific job descriptions and levels of authority, again, in descending order, including:

- Assistants
- Guidance counselors
- Directors
- Department chairs

or other personnel as determined by the district.

### **Site-based Management & Budget Autonomy**

The principal and staff are responsible to the central administration as determined by the district. However, once the staffing ratios are assigned, site administrators generally have autonomous decision-making authority. In other words, if the central administration determines that the size of classes will be increased, the site administrator will make decisions regarding staff cuts.

I refer to these as "hidden" cuts, because budgetary line items rarely include the term "music" in the list of impending cuts. However, the music staff or budget may be significantly affected by those local site decisions. Music advocates must become aware of all the budgetary line items in their district that include music.

### **Where Does the True Power Exist?**

There has lately been a shift to place more emphasis on "Site-Based Management." This educational reform movement is intended to facilitate community input and produce a more collaborative, student-centered decision-making process at the local level. This concept works

most effectively in a system with balanced representation from the community and professional educators, including music advocates, of course.

Site-based management is diminished, or even dangerous, when the membership displays curricular bias, "cronyism," or is dominated by the personal philosophy of an individual administrator.

To keep the focus on the importance of music programs – regardless of whether your district places more emphasis on a centralized or site-based management style – your local music coalition must be visible. As an advocate, your presence must be felt at both central and site administrative levels, as well as at school board meetings, where, ultimately, the final authority rests. If not, our music programs will be in constant threat of reduction or elimination.