

Impact Statements

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One of the greatest and most common mistakes advocates make in attempting to save music programs is suggesting cuts or compromises to preserve "preferred" parts of a music program. Based on my experience, offering these suggestions is one of the primary reasons that music programs are vulnerable to cuts.

The Negative Power of Suggestion

Here's the basic scenario: Often an administrator who assumes music cuts may be needed will contact a specific teacher, music supervisor, or music booster and pose a question such as, "What cut(s) will do the least damage to the music program?" If anyone suggests a possibility, it will be cut. The administration and board are then cleared of any blame or responsibility, and the public is told cuts were based on suggestions from the music people.

I refer to this administrative strategy as "divide and conquer."

Though saving "preferred" parts of the music program may be tempting bait, do not fall into this trap! It is the job of the administration and board to balance the budget. It is your responsibility as an advocate to clearly show the negative impacts of any proposed cuts to the music program.

The Value of Impact Statements

Simply put, impact statements define the short and long-term results of any administrative proposal(s) to cut music. Some purposes for developing impact statements include the following:

1. To keep the issue of how student opportunities in music may be negatively impacted in front of the administration, school board, and particularly the public.
2. To demonstrate any incorrect assumptions made by the administration related to music cuts, particularly regarding economic viability.
3. To demonstrate to the public the potential fiscal and curricular misconceptions or problems with the administrative proposal as related to proposed music cuts.

Build Successful Impact Statements on Accurate Info & Research

The impact statements you develop will vary, and depend upon the information you extract from documents provided by the administration and board. In developing impact statements it is important to make sure all of your information is accurate! Do not make assumptions, do not guess at statistics, and document everything (time, place, source, etc.). As you're building your case and interpreting the data collected, please refer to the articles in my multi-part series on <<Full Time Equivalency: FTE>> for additional help.

Usually you will formulate a response that completes a statement. For example, "If the district adopts its proposal to eliminate 4.0 positions in instrumental music, it will have the following impact(s)." Impacts normally fall into one (or more) of four categories. Each is listed below with sample impact statements based on a proposed elimination of 4.0 instrumental music teachers. [Note: These statements are all minimal. You will soon see that additional research must be done to develop strong, relevant and more complete impact statements for each specific situation.]

Faculty Impacts:

- * The cuts proposed by the administration will reduce the instrumental music staff by 50%.
- * The elimination of 50% of the instrumental music staff will make it impossible to provide music instruction at all schools in the district. (Specify which schools will lose their programs.)

Curricular Impacts:

- * Instrumental music will not be offered as an option for students until grade 7.
- * Individual and small group lessons will not be staffed.
- * All beginners will be placed together in large classes in a single class, regardless of the diversity of instruments and skill levels present.

Student Participation Impacts:

- * Attrition rates will increase due to lack of satisfactory progress and supervision on student achievement.
- * There may be legal challenges from the community related to equal access.
- * Based on national case studies, the loss of the elementary instrumental music curriculum will result in a 65% reduction of instrumental music students in the higher grades.

Economic Impacts:

- * The average (secondary) instrumental music teacher carries a student load equivalent to 1.2 classroom teachers.
- * The district will need to replace each music teacher eliminated with a minimum of 1.2 classroom teachers unless class sizes are significantly increased.
- * In the long-term, losing the cost benefit of large music performance classes (e.g., band) will cancel out any cost savings anticipated by the district. It will also prevent many students in the district from possibly participating in instrumental music.

As you study any proposals made by your administration, you will be able to develop many similar impact statements based upon the uniqueness of your situation. The more effective you are in developing statements that directly relate to the administrative proposal(s) and their negative impact on students and the budget, the more effective you will be in advancing your case.

Remember: A "cut" is any decision made that will negatively impact the ability of any student to participate in making music.

RULE #1

NO CUTS OR COMPROMISES SHOULD BE SUGGESTED BY ANY MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY, INCLUDING THE MUSIC COALITION, MUSIC EDUCATORS, OR THE MUSIC SUPERVISOR!