

Education In America: The Sound Of Silence

BY DEBBIE CAVALIER

Many of us who work in the music industry can point to our school music programs as the spark that ignited our passion for music, many years ago. Well-funded programs provided an array of experiences that fueled our passion and fed our soul.

Studies have shown that the benefits students enjoy from participating in school music programs go far beyond the intrinsic value. Scientific research has documented the importance of music education and its ability to improve overall school performance, raise SAT scores, increase spatial I.Q. and decrease disciplinary problems.

Knowing this, it would only make sense that music would be at the core of America's public school systems; but this is not the case. Many schools have continued to reduce or eliminate music education programs, particularly in major urban school districts. And, with the current emphasis on "basics," too often challenged students do not have time in their schedules to take music classes. This most often occurs in schools where parents are less likely to be advocates for music instruction because of language difficulties or a social or emotional disconnect with schools in general.

The No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law in 2002, names the arts as a core subject. However, even this specific language does not help when it comes to the reality of programming school music. Budget cuts, high-stakes testing and scheduling issues all take their toll on music programs in this country.

Public school budget cutbacks in the arts have created the need for strategic efforts to make the case at all levels of ed-

ucation and government regarding the important role of music and arts in education and society.

"The most helpful thing those that care about music and the arts in our schools can do is to be vocally supportive of music programs to decision makers, to speak about how music is a factor in everyday life regarding decision making, quality of life and cultural connectedness," states June Hinkley, music and fine arts curriculum specialist for the Florida Department of Education. "They need to show that music is not a frill, but at the core of what makes us human and binds us as a nation."

To help champion these efforts, music education advocacy resources containing research and support information are available through the efforts of such organizations as the National Assn. for Music Education, the International Music Products Assn., the American Music Conference and the Music for All Foundation.

Those of us who make a living in the industry should champion advocacy efforts by supporting music education in our schools. Whether you work as a writer, producer, artist or manager, or occupy some other part of the music industry, you know how music can change a life.

In addition to the advocacy and support of the music industry, music educators must take matters into their own hands and become grass-roots, proactive PR and marketing machines for their own school music programs.

Music educators must also continue their own education and learn new skills, including the tools of technology. These skills will help them develop portfolios of their students' work, includ-

ing MP3s and music notation files of student performances, compositions and arrangements.

Just imagine the impact of students walking in the door at the end of the school day proudly stating, "Look at what I made in music class today!" Tangible outcomes can make a difference in the perception of a program's importance.

CAVALIER



The tools of music technology help to make this possible.

With the support and advocacy work of the music industry, and the grass-roots efforts made by music educators, we can begin to replace "The Sounds of Silence" for music in our schools with "A Joyful Noise." ♦♦♦

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