

WAME Alert!

*This is a **WAME Alert!** The **Wisconsin Advocates for Music Education** will email timely and important music education information on a monthly basis to keep you informed and involved. If you have ideas to contribute, please email Rich Mannisto, WAME Chair-Elect: rmannisto@aol.com.*

District cutbacks in time and resources, due to state and local budget problems and the federal No Child Left Untested law, tend to fall unevenly on art and music programs. This WAME Alert will discuss the state law that districts sometimes break in cutting music programs as well as the ethics of some cuts and will suggest how the standards can strengthen the program against future reductions.

State Law. The elementary general music program is usually the first target of cutbacks, at times reducing it below the minimum state requirement of “each week for the entire school term.” Another area is secondary general music, which by law must be available, besides instrumental and choral music, each year to all students in grades 7-12. Districts that go below the minimum offering in elementary general music or do not offer sufficient general music courses in grades 7-12 are subject to sanctions against their state aid. Please notify Mel Pontious State Fine Arts Consultant, if you know of such practices. Email: melvin.pontious@dpi.state.wi.us Phone: 608-267-5042

Ethical Considerations. Another area of concern is individual or small group lessons. While these are not mandated by law, the purpose of education is to prepare students in the various areas of the curriculum to function independently. Ensemble students work hard to serve their school and community well in concerts, festivals, community appearances, and at athletic events – all on their own free time. But if the school and community don’t help students by providing lessons to develop their basic performance skills and enable them to become independent learners and life-long participants in music, the school and community are not serving *them* well.

The Standards As Advocacy. Criticism of education is often due to a lack of understanding. By describing in a very straightforward way what students should know and be able to do, the Standards can play an important role in helping the public understand the substantive outcomes of the music program. Demonstrating these understandings is also important. At general music and ensemble performances an effective practice is to have the students inform the audience of the standards being addressed in each piece, the progress made, and important points about the music being performed. Such a performance becomes an “informance” and is a proven way to generate interest and support as well as enhance student understanding.

Further, basing the program on the Standards is important in developing a substantive, comprehensive, and successful program, a factor that in itself promotes public and administrative support. For instance, the July WAME Alert featured the Oregon School District’s decision to retain 4th grade strings and small group instruction (lessons) based on the administration’s view of the program as an important element of the CORE curriculum. This was due both to the music staff’s focus over time on students learning and demonstrating the comprehensive understandings embodied in the Standards as well as to the parent and public support that is a product of such a program.

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