



# TOUCHPOINT

The Division of Education Newsletter

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DIVISION OF EDUCATION

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## A Note from Dr. Tim

Greetings. In this edition of *Touchpoint*, **Robert Floyd**, Executive Director for the Texas Music Educators Association and leading music education lobbyist, provides a practical platform and approach to advocate for music education at the state level.



By Robert Floyd

## Music Advocacy

### State Advocacy—Whose Job Is It?

One of the most challenging aspects of a music educator's job is fighting for your program at the local level. When high-stakes testing and limited funding seem to drive every decision, how do you continue to provide the best opportunities for your students?

Of course, the most effective advocacy tool is a high-quality program valued by students, parents, administration, and the community. But even in states like Texas where local control is the prevailing educational philosophy, support at the state level remains critical to ensure the continued presence of music in our schools.

### Monitor Policy Development

With the myriad of Internet resources, anyone can monitor state policy and legislative activity. Almost all states provide websites that allow you to search legislation by topic—such as fine arts or arts education—to track bills, find schedule alerts on bill movement and watch committee hearings or full House, and Senate sessions live or via archive. Your state board of education, which passes rules that impact school policy, is fairly easy to monitor as well.

***You teach all day and don't have time for that?*** If so, and your state music educators organization is not in a position to guide such a process, reach out to retired teachers who want to continue to give to the profession or parents with an interest in politics. Even students could assist. All are wonderful candidates to do just this—even from the comfort of their own homes. During the most recent Texas legislative session, the successful effort to lower the number of high school state end-of-course assessments from fifteen to five was led by a group of passionate moms—not high-dollar lobbyists.

When legislation is moving that might negatively affect arts education, inform teachers and parents. Nothing puts a bill on the radar of a politician faster than a call from a constituent back home. Band and orchestras have built-in networks through their booster clubs, so be sure to utilize those resources. Consider establishing a website where arts advocates can register. When a hearing or vote on a bill is forthcoming, a simple alert can be sent to trigger contacts to your state leaders.

### Identify Arts Supporters

It's crucial to identify which state leaders, or even more importantly which staffers, are champions of arts education. Staffers quite often advise their legislator on how to vote and can become an unofficial part of your team. You might also be surprised at how many legislators are searching for bills to file. Arts education overall is not controversial and the risks are minimal for the legislator. Even if a bill does not pass or even move out of committee, it is still a success to get your issue before the members through public testimony. Passing a bill during the session in which it is introduced is a rarity, but quite often the takeaway may be that you did not lose ground in some manner. For arts education, this is certainly still a victory. Remember that no politician purposely steps out and opposes the arts, but the arts are quite often caught in the backwash of another piece of legislation intended to fix education.

While it is unwise to barrage your state leaders about every bill you believe might hurt your program, a response from arts supporters about a particular piece of legislation puts your interest group on the radar of decision makers. The most important action is to simply get started! Do not delay! Your students and your program will be the beneficiaries.



Join **Gary Markham**,  
**Dr. Lowell Graham**,  
**Beth Sokolowski** and  
**Dr. Johanna Siebert** at the  
**Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic**  
on December 19th and 20th, 2013  
where they will be discussing  
current issues pertinent to music  
education leaders.

For more information about this  
opportunity, send inquiries to  
education@conn-selmer.com,  
attention: Music Administration  
Collaborative at Midwest

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Conn-Selmer percussion artist  
and clinician.

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