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TOUCHPOINT

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Go, Team!

By Marcia Neel

"Go, Team!" We've all heard it a million times – the cheer that expresses intense identification and desire to win at a sporting event. Innovative school district music departments across the country are taking the "Go, Team" approach in a whole different direction.

During a recent district-wide professional development in-service day, an Iowa school district's music educators explored how they might better communicate the great work of their program and the high achievements of their students to their constituents: students not yet participating in the music program, school faculty and staff, district leaders, parents, and the greater community. Even though the educators were doing a tremendous job in their programs, they had a sense of being untethered, as if they were not being given specific direction and were on their own to "do it all." Even though the educators were doing a tremendous job in their programs, they felt they were not getting traction within their communities.

As I visited with teachers, we kept bumping into that ever-present question "Why music education?" and how the answer would have significance for them as music educators.

The comprehensive, yet inspiring and invigorating process yielded a surprising discovery. As varied as everyone's concerns were, everyone really wanted the same thing: for all students to



About the Author

A 36-year veteran in public school music education, **Marcia Neel** has directed successful secondary music programs in Connecticut, Ohio, Massachusetts, and Nevada. She served as the Supervisor of the Secondary Music Education Program of Clark County School District (CCSD) in Las Vegas from 1994 to 2007. During those years, she led the secondary music program to more than 50,000 students in 56 middle school and 38 high school music programs and 100,000 students in secondary fine and performing arts.

Well-known for her commitment to program expansion and innovation, Neel

have a lifelong relationship with active music-making. Wow! This goal is not about creating more symphony musicians. Rather, it's that if students continue to be active music-makers into adulthood – whatever the setting – their lives will be substantially enriched and they will be considerably more productive, uplifting, energized, and joyful. Thus music educators are preparing students to go out into the world equipped to enjoy a significant and meaningful life.

So how could the music educators make this happen? With just a few ideas to prime the pump, the "team" went into action, scoring goal after goal. Most important, they agreed to begin meeting monthly so they could continue to move forward as a team. The first order of business: find a way to articulate their game plan.

Over the December break they would reflect on this "big audacious goal" of preparing all students for lifelong music-making experiences. Then they would come to the January meeting with ideas to share so that they could begin to formalize a district-wide mission for their department.

Here are some of the actions that will not only create increased district and community awareness (the original goal of the professional development) but also promote the vision for elementary school students to picture themselves as high school music students and for the students' parents to envision their children as high school music students from the very beginning.

1. Formalize and promote a district-wide music department mission statement.
2. Schedule small ensemble performances at the start of every school board meeting, and allow time for a school board member to speak to the students about their accomplishments in music.
3. Include a music recruiting section on every school's website.
4. Develop an educational plan or flow chart to prescribe how students can take music classes through all four high school years. Provide the plan to the parents of music students.
5. Feature elementary school band students with the high school band as their VIP guests at a halftime show. As the announcer calls out each elementary student's name, the student will run onto the field into position in front of a high school student who plays a like instrument.

The elementary school director will conduct the group and will also choose the material to be performed. This could be as simple as a phrase of two or three notes played over chord changes performed by the high school band. Dance moves may be included. The purpose is to bring the elementary school students into the high school arena and for parents to begin envisioning their child as a high school

is recognized as a leader among her peers for her creative approaches to curriculum design and implementation. One of the most successful is the CCSD's standards-based Mariachi Program instituted in 2002 with four instructors teaching 250 students and now staffed by 18 full-time, licensed mariachi educators teaching more than 3,000 students. Neel is the lead author of "¡Simplemente Mariachi!," an instrumental and vocal method series for mariachi students and educators.

A national presenter for the Music Achievement Council and Wenger Corporation, she provides motivating workshops across the country for educators seeking to sharpen their teaching skills.

Neel is president of Music Education Consultants, Inc., a consortium of music education professionals who work with a variety of educational organizations, arts associations, and school districts to foster the growth and breadth of school-based music education programs. Specialty areas include curriculum development and expansion, professional development, teacher induction programs, and the providing of conductors and adjudicators for honor ensembles and music festivals.

Contact [Marcia](#)



Did you know the Music Administration Collaborative has its own track at Conn-Selmer Institute?

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Additional Articles & Resources

Telling the Story: What Administrators Can Do

Your administrative team – principal and superintendent – allocate time and resources for instruction. Their support is critical to developing a climate in which your arts program can grow.

Music Achievement Council Flash Drive

To assist you in your role as a music education professional, the Music Achievement Council has loaded a flash drive with resources and information.

Bridging the Gap Between Middle School and High School

Bridging the Gap brings together the efforts of Middle and High School teachers, parents, principals, music supervisors and yes, students themselves, has a profound effect on recruiting, and especially retention going from middle to high school.

band student. High school booster parents will provide complimentary refreshments and VIP seating for parents of the elementary students.

6. High school instrumental directors will choose an appropriate selection and score a recorder part to feature the elementary school students in the spring concert. This event is also geared toward having the students view themselves as high school instrumental students and for the parents to see their children performing on the high school stage.
7. Elementary and middle school teachers will invite the high school teachers to conduct a piece in one of their school concerts.
8. The high school principal will work with middle school principals to facilitate scheduling so that recurring visits become part of the regular teaching assignment.
9. The high school parent booster organization will host the middle school parent organization at a casual supper to discuss informally the many benefits of participating in the high school program. High school students will provide brief entertainment. Several high school students will also be invited to speak to the middle school parents about the impact the high school program has had on them personally.
10. High school students will write congratulatory notes to the middle school and elementary students, as appropriate, to commend them on an extraordinary performance, being chosen for something special, etc. This is to develop a big brother/big sister relationship.
11. High school students will attend concerts given by the programs in which they participated in lower grades. After the concert, they will provide positive feedback to the students of that program via written notes (see item 10) or emails to the director to be read aloud to the students during class.
12. The principal of one of the middle or elementary schools will be invited to give remarks at one of the high school concerts and vice versa. Elementary or middle school parents will gain confidence in the high school program when they hear the high school principal speaking favorably about it. Conversely, the high school parents will be impressed that the elementary or middle school principal still cares enough about their children that he or she would make the time to speak at the high school concert. These types of principal exchanges reinforce that the accepted, standard procedure is for students to continue in music throughout their school years.

But the team didn't stop there.

1. High school students will come up with an idea for a comprehensive video about their program to be posted on the department's website. The video should tell the story about their program.

2. Use the first performance for band or orchestra as an informance concert six or seven weeks into the first year of study for beginning students. Close this miniconcert with a high-spirited performance from the high school ensemble. Invite principals to read the provided narrations.
3. Have the best high school students provide lessons at a summer music camp to be held at the high school during the first week or two after the close of school. Pairing younger students with older ones in a supervised setting could motivate the younger musicians to practice over the summer. The camp also provides another opportunity for high school students to serve as role models for younger students. It might even awaken the high school students to the possibility of becoming a music educator.

So much has already been accomplished! The Iowa team capitalized on the business model of identifying what it was that they, as one, unified organization, agreed was their true mission. We even spoke about creating a tagline such as "Creating a more fulfilling future for our students" or "Creating harmony in our community."

Everyone knows the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority slogan, "What happens here, stays here." So how can we adapt it for our music departments? How about, "What happens in music lasts for a lifetime."

Go, Team!

"While we may have strong disagreements and opposing opinions, aren't we all eager to see our students experience the joys of musical excellence? Isn't that the likeness that brings us together? And the way we go about achieving this common goal represents the differences that keep us together. Ultimately, the key is to support one another, for within this context is the potential for unlimited growth for our profession, our programs, and —most importantly—your students."

—Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

From "Professional Harmony: Our Key to Success" from Dr. Tim's book **Music Advocacy and Student Leadership**

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