



FIVE SECRETS

OF EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY
IN MUSIC EDUCATION



SMALL CHANGES LEAD TO
BIG IMPROVEMENTS



SECRET NO.5

Advocacy isn't like the movies

It's Built in Small, Daily Actions

Start small and advocate often

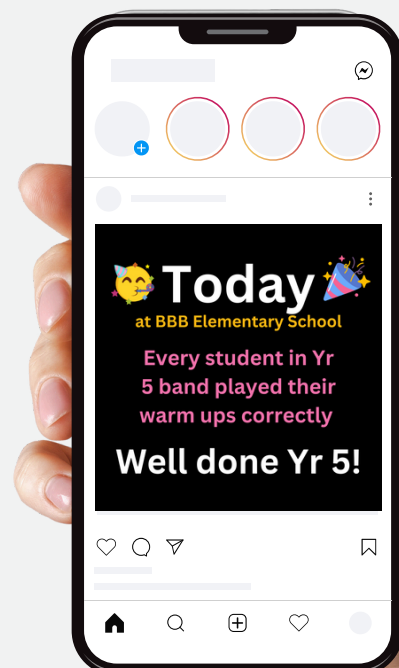
Hollywood would have us believe that advocacy happens in one powerful, emotional speech that changes everything overnight. In reality, change happens in small, consistent steps over time.

Every conversation, every interaction, every moment you educate someone about the value of music learning adds up.

It could be a quick chat with a parent after a concert, a casual mention of music's academic benefits to a school leader, or a simple social media post celebrating student progress.

ACTION TIP

Choose one small way to advocate each day—whether it's sharing a quick fact in a staff meeting, posting a student success story, or reinforcing the value of music learning in everyday conversations.



SECRET NO.4

True Power Lies Beyond Traditional Leadership

**Advocate Where Decisions
Are Made, Not Just Where
Titles Exist**

Influence the Right People

It's easy to assume that school leaders hold all the decision-making power, but change often happens at different levels. The real influence can come from those who control specific aspects of your program—timetable coordinators, budget committees, and administrative staff.

A well-timed conversation with the person responsible for scheduling can unlock rehearsal time. Engaging the finance officer can ensure your program's funding needs are understood. Seeking support from influential teachers can build internal momentum for music education.

ACTION TIP

Identify three key people who influence decisions around scheduling, funding, or resources.

Start a conversation with one of them this week to advocate for a small but meaningful change.



SECRET NO.3

Small, Specific Requests Lead to Big Wins

**Tiny Tweaks Today,
Transformative Changes
Tomorrow**

Ask for What You Actually Need

Advocacy is most effective when it's specific and actionable. Vague requests like "We need more support for music" often go unanswered. Instead, break down what you need into clear, manageable asks:



Instead of: "We need better scheduling for our rehearsals."



Say: "Can we adjust the timetable by 10 minutes so students have time to transition and maximize their rehearsal, so we can play at our very best at the parent assembly next term?"



Instead of: "Music should have a bigger budget."



Say: "It is important to allocate funds for instrument repairs this semester, so that this valuable asset doesn't degrade?"

Small, achievable changes create momentum and pave the way for larger shifts over time.

ACTION TIP

Write down three small but impactful changes that would make a difference in your program.

Practise stating them clearly so you're ready when an opportunity arises.



SECRET NO.2

Stealth Advocacy is your secret weapon

**Let Your Environment
Do the Talking**

Advocacy Without the Spotlight

Advocacy doesn't always require direct conversations. Sometimes, the most effective advocacy happens without a word. Stealth advocacy is about weaving music's benefits into everyday school life in ways that naturally inform and influence.

- 📌 Post engaging visuals about music's impact on learning in hallways and classrooms.
- 📌 Hand out flyers at concerts explaining how music builds cognitive skills.
- 📌 Add music education facts to your email signature or newsletters.
- 📌 Share success stories on social media and tag your school's leadership.

When people see consistent, research-backed messaging about music's value, they begin to internalize it—without ever feeling like they're being "sold" on the idea.

ACTION TIP

Choose one place where you can introduce stealth advocacy this week—whether it's a hallway poster, a concert program insert, or a social media post.



SECRET NO.1

Practise, Practise, Practise

**Confidence in Advocacy Comes
from Repetition and Refinement**

Find Your Advocacy Style

Just like teaching music, advocacy is a skill that improves with practise. The more you advocate, the more confident and effective you'll become.

Every audience—parents, students, school leaders—requires a different approach. Parents may respond best to emotional stories, while administrators might need data and research.

By practicing and observing what works, you'll develop an advocacy style that feels natural and impactful.

ACTION TIP

Make advocacy a habit by practicing in low-pressure situations.

Try explaining the value of music learning in a casual conversation with a friend, a student, or a colleague.

Pay attention to what resonates and refine your approach over time.

A man in a white shirt and black pants is seen from behind, writing on a chalkboard. The chalkboard has the words "PRACTISE MAKES PERFECT" written on it in white chalk.

PRACTISE
MAKES PERFECT

Take the First Step Today

Advocacy doesn't have to be overwhelming. By taking small, strategic actions, you can build strong, lasting support for your music program.

Start today by choosing just one of these five secrets to put into action.

Whether it's making a specific request, engaging a new decision-maker, or setting up a stealth advocacy strategy, every step you take moves your program forward.

Why do we need to advocate for music learning anyway?

This is a question I get asked very often. Well, not really asked, more of an exasperated exclamation from a music teacher who doesn't understand why everyone doesn't appreciate or value that music learning can enrich every child.

"How can they not see how powerful music learning is for children?"

"It is so obvious, why do they not understand?"

"With all this evidence, surely that means that everyone should just start giving me more support!"

Unfortunately, humans are just not that simple. It doesn't matter how much evidence is presented or how obvious something may seem to be, without a positive, personal experience of music learning, the average parent or school leader has no idea what the value of music learning is to every child or adults' development.

Everything is personal, but early in my journey to understand music education advocacy, it became very clear to me that music learning in particular is held very close to the heart.

I had the opportunity to visit eight national politicians in a series of meetings across one day. I was with a panel of music learning advocates and our job was to promote the many musical and non-musical benefits for children of learning music. We had a script and key points to hit, but every meeting went slightly differently but there was one commonality to every one of those eight meetings.



Every one of the politicians started with a personal story. Their personal story, or their own children, of music learning in childhood. Most of the stories were positive, one if the stories was very negative, but all of the politicians valued music learning because they could identify from first-hand experience how it had influenced their lives.

It struck me as I reflected on the day that these were our champions, but not the people we needed to advocate to. The people we needed to advocate to were those who were either unaware of the impactful nature of music learning or strongly opposed to supporting music learning for their children or their students.

Why not stick with the people who agree with us and can see the value of our work as music educators? Surely speaking to people who didn't care or strongly disagreed with us is just a whole bunch of hard, unrewarding work.

That is absolutely what it feels like at the beginning but there is a very good reason for us to take those vulnerable steps, to speak out and to engage with those that disagree with us.

It will make our lives and our work easier and more rewarding.



Although it is hard to put a firm number on the percentage of the population that experience music learning in a meaningful and beneficial way, studies into Western societies have pointed to between 12-15% of the population. This is different in the Scandinavian countries where music learning is embedded in the education system and valued with each generation as they raise their children.

Let's just take the 12-15% of people that we encounter in the big wide world, not in our music teachers bubble which most of choose to and have to live in due to the nature of our very antisocial hours and timetables, that have had a meaningful and positive experience of music education. They get it, they just get it, because for anywhere between two years and a lifetime, they have been immersed in the music learning experience.

That means that 85-88% of people we come in contact with have not had that positive and meaningful music learning experience. We can start describing the music learning experience and they have absolutely no point of reference, we might as well be describing what it is like to land on the moon

What was the last new skill that you learned? Mine was archery. I went along to a Sunday morning class with my family and we got taught the basics or shooting an arrow into a target. The instructor explained it all and intellectually I got it. I didn't know if I could do it yet, I didn't appreciate how hard it was going to be and I didn't love the activity yet.

That is the point we take parents, non-music teachers, school leaders and funders to when we explain what is involved in music learning. They get it in their head, but not yet in their body or in their heart.

Once I started shooting arrows (I could hit the target from the start and I could feel the little dopamine hit every time I did it) I got it. I understood the dedication it would take to become even half-good at it, I was aware of how my brain was needing to communicate with my body, and when I did miss a few I noticed how the negative self-talk started to kick in. This was a full brain and body workout that takes dedication, repetition and expert guidance to master.

Does this mean we need to get every single person we come in contact with to learn a musical instrument? While that would be nice it is practically impossible. But it does mean that we need to make the music learning experience real to everyone we work with.

The reason we need to advocate is that we are working with 85-88% of the population who have no experience of what we are talking about. Therefore, they have no idea how to support our work or how to support the learning process of their children or students.



They do not know how to manage the discomfort and stagnation that is an inherent part of the music learning process or identify the ways music learning can support holistic, permanent and positive human development across the lifespan.

We need to advocate for music learning to bring that 85-88% into the world we know so well. When we do this, we make the learning process for everyone more enjoyable and effective. When we do this, our work becomes more enjoyable and more effective.

Advocacy is our friend, not our burden. The question is, how do we do it in a way that is easy, effective and even enjoyable?

Enter the Educate to Advocate approach.



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