

PROMOTING YOUR ARTS EDUCATION PROGRAM TO YOUR LOCAL LEGISLATORS

Who are they?

Most smaller districts are well aware of the names and contact information for their state representatives and senators. If you don't have that information, here are some ways to get it:

- Contact your local League of Women Voters or the headquarters of either political party.
- Go to the state's web site: www.state.nm.us
 - Under "Government in NM" go to "Legislative Branch" and click on "State Legislature"
 - Click on "Find Your Legislator"
 - Under both House and Senate click on "search by Name, District, or Zip Code" and search accordingly.

National Elections

While the majority of the focus may be on the national elections, remember that many of state representatives and senators may be up for re-election at the same time.

- Find out who the candidates are in your House and Senate district(s).
- If there are local candidate forums, be sure to ask the candidates about their stand on funding for arts education.
- If you find a candidate who is not familiar with the Fine Arts Education Act (FAEA), this is a great chance to educate him or her.

Contacting Your Legislators

If your legislators' re-election bid is uncontested, please start contacting them right away about your program. If your legislator is an incumbent who was supportive of the FAEA in the past, be sure to preface any of your contacts with him/her with a "thank you" for the support.

If there is a contested election for your local representative(s) and/or senator(s), wait until after the November election to begin contacting them with information about your program.

Some Specific Suggestions

- If your arts program has a newsletter, include your legislators on the mailing list.
- Invite your legislators to student concerts, plays, and art exhibits. Make the invitation personal, i.e., a hand-written note on the "official" invitation (if there is one), an invitation made by a student, or even a personal phone call.
- If your legislator(s) actually attend, be sure to
 - greet him/her personally when they come in
 - acknowledge their attendance to the audience, if possible
 - introduce him/her to people he/she may not know, especially students
- Legislators like to be able to refer to hard data and specific examples of success. Since pie chart and bar graph data about arts program achievements are hard to determine, collect anecdotal evidence of program success. Some examples might be:
 - Make copies of notes sent to art and music teachers from students, classroom teachers, and parents regarding the positive effect(s) of arts instruction.
 - Send a survey to classroom teachers asking them to describe any examples of the positive influences that music and/or art instruction have had on any of their students or on their class as a whole (i.e., behavior, attendance, social development, cross-curricular connections, etc.)
 - Summarize the feedback you receive in a readable format. You'll be very gratified about how positive it will be!
 - Take photos of arts specialists or artists working with children; a picture really is worth "a thousand words." Use the caption as an opportunity to explain how the arts can be a

means for cross-curricular connections, multicultural awareness, problem solving, critical thinking, etc.

- Have students write letters to their legislators about why they think the arts are important.
 - If you work with a classroom teacher on this project, it can also be a great civics lesson as well an additional opportunity to practice their letter-writing skills.
- Make sure your legislators know how to contact you: name, title, office address, phone, fax, and email.

Contact with your legislators is critical on a year-round basis, not just during the legislative session when they are bombarded with requests for their time and attention. Try to establish a presence for yourself and your program throughout the year and in a variety of ways. The more informed they are when they attend the legislative session, the better job they can do on behalf of arts education.

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