

TOOL

Making the Case for Your Child's School Choir: A PARENT'S ADVOCACY GUIDE

The benefits of incorporating the arts into children's education have been well documented (reference the complete *Making the Case for Your School Choir: An Advocacy Guide*), and choral singing is an integral part of arts education.

The goal of this supplemental guide is to specifically help parents build a solid case for having choral music as part of the school curriculum. Working with your child's teacher and other partners, use this information to encourage school boards and administrators to begin, revive, or expand your child's school choral program.

WHY

Why should parents advocate for choral music programs in schools? There are several reasons:

1. *Singing in a chorus is good for children in school and can help them in the future.*

Chorus America first evaluated the benefits of choral singing and its impact on communities in a 2003 study. The data indicated that an early introduction to choral singing is a building block for lifelong learning and social success. The study found that choral singers exhibit more social skills, civic involvement, volunteerism, philanthropy, and support of other art forms, than non-singers. **The vast majority of adult choral singers today began singing in elementary and middle school.**

In 2009, Chorus America conducted a follow-up study that included a component exploring the value of singing for children. The *Chorus Impact Study* results show that children who sing in choruses display many of the enhanced social skills found in adult singers, substantiating earlier conclusions that singing in childhood is likely to have an enormous influence on the choices individuals make later in life.

2. *The decline in choral singing opportunities for children and youth is a concern.*

Although more than 10 million American children are now singing in choirs:

- One in five parents say there are no choir opportunities for their child in their child's school or local community.
- More than one in four educators say there is no choir program in their schools.

- Of the educators who said that their school has no choir program today, 31% said their school used to have such a program.

Schools have been the primary source of free opportunities to sing in choruses—as many parents say the reason their child is not in a choir is because their school has no program (20%) as say there are no choral opportunities whatsoever for their child.

3. *Parental involvement is the key!*

Educators report that schools *where parental involvement is high* are:

- Significantly more likely to have music programs than schools where parental influence is low (96% vs. 81%).
- Significantly more likely to have choral music programs than low parental influence schools (80% vs. 60%).
- Significantly more likely to assign students to choirs, rather than just let them elect to join (20% vs. 8%).
- Have significantly higher proportions of students involved in choirs (30% vs. 17%).

WHAT (MAKING THE CASE)

In the 21st century, America's manufacturing-driven economy will be replaced by a creative economy or "economy of ideas." President Obama is calling for a "complete and competitive education" for American students to ensure our place in the global economy. **How do we prepare our students to meet these challenges, when today only 41% of high school students say they attend school because of what they learn, and 82% say they want more opportunities to be creative?**

Arts education prepares students for success in school and in life.

Young people can be better prepared for the 21st century through quality learning experiences in and through the arts. According to Arne Duncan, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, "First, the arts significantly boost student achievement, reduce discipline problems, and increase the odds that students will go on to graduate from college. Second, arts education is essential to stimulating the creativity and innovation that will prove critical to young Americans competing in a global economy. And last, but not least, the arts are valuable for their own sake." ►

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- High-arts, low-income students are *3X more likely* to earn BA and MA degrees than low-arts, low-income students.
- 78% of English language learners (ELL) in arts-rich schools attend four-year colleges vs. 58% of ELL students in arts-poor schools.
- The arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached.
- The arts provide new challenges for those students who are already considered successful.

Choral singing is an integral part of arts education.

The value of singing for children and youth is both wide-ranging and well documented. According to both parents and educators who participated in Chorus America's *Chorus Impact Study*, children who sing in choruses have more academic success and advanced social skills than students who don't participate in choir. Parents definitively date their child's improvements in a variety of areas to when their child joined a choir. That, and the breadth of benefits described by both parents and educators, argues for a unique "choir effect," one that isn't simply replicated by participation in other activities, according to the researchers.

- 54% of students currently in choir earn A's in English/language arts vs. 43% of students who have never sung in choir. 47% of choir students earn A's in math vs. 38% of non-choir students.
- 61% of parents stated their children's academic performance improved after joining choir.
- 90% of educators agree that singing in choir enhances student creativity.
- 93% of educators state that singing in choir makes students better participants in other groups.
- 94% of educators in schools with ethnically diverse populations agree that choir can give some students a reason to stay engaged in school who might otherwise be lost.

Choral singing builds community.

- 91% of educators agree that choir participation adds to a school's sense of community and school spirit.
- 43% of children in choirs usually watch one hour or less of television per day vs. 29% of non-choir children.
- 76% of teachers believe singing in a choir can make students more likely to attend other classes.
- Students with intensive arts involvement volunteer more frequently and participate in more community service

projects, and 67% of teachers agree singing in choir makes students more likely to volunteer.

- 52% of students engaged in afterschool activities were taking music, dance, or art lessons.

Choral singing has intrinsic value.

- Choral music is the most popular form of public participation in the arts.
- Choral singing is a beautiful, participatory, and accessible art form.
- "What children would miss most in a musically reduced or barren environment are the musical experiences that music education brings to them. It's the loss of music that will matter." –James Catterall, Professor, UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies
- "In a time when society is becoming more fragmented, when individuals are feeling more isolated and alienated, choral music brings people together. It is the music of social cohesion, the music that builds community. It brings together people of different ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds, united in a love of great music...It is the only kind of music that connects people in the most profound ways." – Knight Kiplinger, Editor in Chief, *Kiplinger's Personal Finance*, *Kiplinger's Letter*, and Kiplinger.com

HOW

Here are five clear steps to help you advocate for funding a chorus in your child's school:

1. **Familiarize yourself with the data.** The sampling of research findings in this supplementary guide are just a small part of the positive information contained in *Making the Case for Your School Choir: An Advocacy Guide* and its annotated bibliography. School boards and administrators will be interested in understanding these facts and statistics that illustrate clearly the impact arts education and specifically participation in choral singing has on learning and childhood development.
2. **Assess the situation and define the goal.** Make sure that you have a complete understanding of the school's financial position, budgeting cycle, and scheduling concerns, as well as the current state of the choral music program and how it is integrated (or not) into the school's culture and schedule. Work with your child's choir teacher to define clear goals that will resonate with the administration and achieve positive results. ►



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3. **Gather vocal supporters.** Working with your child's choir teacher, recruit other parents, music educators, and school leaders to help you build and deliver the business case for arts funding. Complete the **Build Your Network** worksheet found in *Making the Case for Your School Choir*.
4. **Develop your action plan and monitor progress.** Identify forums where decisions are made, such as PTA and school board meetings, and get on their agendas to present your case. School district websites are an invaluable source of information about when meetings occur and how to get involved. Follow up with school board members and administrators. Make personal appointments with school leaders to further discuss this critical issue and obtain commitments for funding. Use the **Making the Case PowerPoint Presentation** as a ready-made presentation template.
5. **Celebrate and share your success.** Call out your progress in public ways—recognize volunteers or helpful administrators at the school choral concerts, keep a blog to document and publicize your progress, post YouTube videos publicly thanking members of the school board, ask your child and other singers in his/her choir to hand-write thank-you notes to advocates or administrators, pitch stories to your local media outlets, etc. Be creative!

Making the Case for Your School Choir: An Advocacy Guide and the tools mentioned above are available for download free of charge at: www.chorusamerica.org/choiradvocacyguide/free. ■

Sources cited: www.whitehouse.gov, www.ed.gov, *Champions of Change* (1999), *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art* (2009), *Chorus Impact Study* (2009), *Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18- Year-Olds* (2010), *Charting the Path from Engagement to Achievement: A Report on the 2009 HSSE* (2009), *All Work & No Play?* (2004), *America After 3pm* (2009). Complete bibliographic citations available in *Making the Case for Your School Choir: An Advocacy Guide* at: www.chorusamerica.org/choiradvocacyguide/free