

John Benham

A QUARTERLY REPORT ON EFFORTS TO SAVE MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS



# Two Decades of Making a Difference

It's estimated to have saved more than 900 music-related teaching positions and to have been influential in saving the music programs of more than 824,000 students. Its reach has spanned across 47 states and 6 Canadian provinces, and has extended as far as New Zealand, England, Germany and the Ukraine. And in terms of dollar figures—something to which all retailers can certainly relate—it's estimated to have resulted in some \$75 to \$90 million annually in gross revenues for the music products industry.

So what is this powerful 'it'? It is, of course, the Saving School Music program, which has had an immeasurable impact on the school music market since its inception in 1981. John Benham, founder of Music in World Cultures and the person who's been at the helm of this program since its inception, recently took stock of the program, its successes and the challenges that lie ahead.

*This is the fourth and final article in a series addressing what people can do to help their local school music programs from being cut. While last issue's column outlined the process to go through when actually facing budget cuts in your district, this article provides a summary of what the Saving School Music program has accomplished since its inception. As was mentioned in the first article of the series, industry funding of the program will end this spring. As a result, this is the last regular column featuring John Benham.*

## Major Achievements & Issues

According to Benham, perhaps the two biggest accomplishments of the program were the Georgia Project and the publishing of *How To Save Your Music Program—A Handbook for the Music Advocate*. The Georgia Project "may be as big a study ever conducted on the importance of music in the schools," explains Benham. "It was probably singularly

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responsible for defeating school-to-work in Georgia and influencing the adoption of required fine arts credit for graduation."

The latter how-to handbook has also had a profound effect. "When you calculate the value of the music programs we've saved—based on the

figures each district had listed in its budget cuts—we're now at \$36.7 million," says Benham. "And about 43% of that has been accomplished by people who used my book, attended my seminars, or communicated with me via phone or e-mail. In other words, I didn't have to do a direct intervention in nearly half of these instances."

Benham estimates the overall success rate of the program to be between 95% and 98%. "We only lost when teachers were divided or suggested cuts themselves, or in districts where there was no parent support."

In addition to the book, seminars, phone and e-mail communications, and direct crisis interventions (during which Benham traveled to affected districts), methods used in distributing the information included: Attendance at national, regional and state conferences; cooperation with professional organizations such as MENC, ASTA, ACDA, NABIM, NASMD and NAMM; cooperation with individual dealers; 'Parent Power Days', or training coalitions; and cooperation with symphony boards and auxiliaries.

In these many ways, the Saving School Music program was able to confront several issues head-on. "Early on, it was primarily budget



cuts,” explains Benham. “And while we still deal with the issue of budget cuts today, we now deal more with educational reforms—block scheduling, school-to-work programs, tax vouchers, etc. And we’re finding that a lot of these reforms have actually been motivated by budget cuts.”

## Continuing to Meet the Challenge

While much has been accomplished in school districts across the country, there is little doubt that challenges will continue to arise for school music programs. As Benham

points out, many of the hurdles he’s had to face over the years still exist today. These include:

- a lack of unity in the music education profession (too much competition and not enough cooperation);
- a lack of unified community support groups (coalitions);
- a lack of statistical data; and
- funding.

“In spite of what people think, funding is still an issue in public education, and tax cuts are still a primary force,” explains Benham. “And educational reforms continue to be a problem.” Additionally, he says he’s

concerned by public and professional educators’ denial of existing problems and their sense of helplessness and/or apathy.

So where will music advocacy efforts go from here? That remains to be seen. But Benham says he isn’t surprised by all that’s been accomplished via the program and by members of the industry working together. “I guess it doesn’t surprise me because I’ve kept tabs on it over the years,” he says.

Another thing that Benham has kept more-informal tabs on is those people and organizations who have aided in his efforts. “I’d like to express my sincere thanks to NABIM, NAMM and NASMD, as well as *School Music Dealer*, which has been at the forefront of publishing what takes place here. I’d also like to thank several individuals—Kurt Karls of Schmitt Music Company in Minneapolis, who recently passed away and was the first to link me with industry; Karl Bruhn and Pat Page at NAMM, who have been very effective in working together; and Mike Bennett of Yamaha and NABIM, who’s really the one who came up with the concept of the Superfund.”

*If you would like a detailed account of the process outlined in this article, you can purchase a copy of John Benham’s book How to Save Your School Music Program. Cost is \$17.95, plus shipping and handling. To order—or if you have any questions about information presented in this series—contact Benham at (612) 446-4246.*

## A Look at the Numbers

Over the course of the last decade, John Benham has kept track of dollars spent as well as those saved. Following is a quick look at some of the facts and figures related to the Saving School Music program.

- The majority (85%) of Benham’s program activities were paid for by NABIM’s Superfund. The remaining 15% was picked up by local sources, such as school music dealers, parents groups, etc.
- The average cost of the Saving School Music program per hour—including Benham’s travel, food and lodging expenses—was \$104/hr.
- Benham has accrued some 875,000 frequent flyer miles during his tenure, during which he attended 23 national and regional conventions, 40 state/provincial conferences, 24 seminars for educational institutions, retail dealers and Parent Power Days, and 2 allied arts conferences.
- The average cost of a direct intervention—including travel, food and lodging expenses—in any given district was between \$3,000 and \$3,500.
- When considering the number of music programs that have been saved over the years, Benham conservatively estimates that it converts to somewhere in the neighborhood of \$75 to \$90 million a year in gross revenues for the industry.