



EDITORIAL

TRY WATCHING THE NATURE CHANNEL

The news is grim. State governments based their spending on the cheerful assumption that tax revenues would continue growing at a rapid pace for all eternity. Then they got mugged by reality. The stock market tanked turning capital gains into capital losses, bonus checks shrunk, and overnight 46 out of the 50 states were in the midst of what has been described as the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. Frantically trying to close yawning budget deficits, chastened Governors are now threatening dire cutbacks in services and tax boosts. Since education, after health care, is the biggest expenditure item in most state budgets, it only stands to reason that school spending should go down over the next year or two. And if school spending diminishes, then non-core programs like music stand to be decimated.

Why then at the recent National Association of School Music Dealers Convention (see coverage on page 78) were retailers surprisingly unruffled at the prospect of what some have called a pending disaster? If anyone has cause for concern, it's this group of retailers, which derives the majority of its revenue from providing instruments to school music programs. Realistically, they recognize that some music programs will probably become casualties of financial shortfalls and that short term sales may diminish. But their composure can be traced to a unique perspective and understanding of the idiosyncracies of school music programs.

Most NASMD dealers are inside local schools every day of the school year and have a better grasp of the educational budget process than anyone. They have heard crisis rhetoric before, and they know that a lot of the heated language is little more than positioning and saber rattling. They also know that much of the funding for school programs doesn't actually come from the school: Schools pay the teacher's salary while parents, either directly or through fund raisers, pay for instruments, music, uniforms, and just about everything else. Reduced school budgets may take a toll on the sale of big instruments like sousaphones and timpani, but, dealers reason, "No one makes a profit on school bids, so it won't really affect our business."

To truly understand why these retailers remain confident about the durability of school music programs, try tuning into one of those episodes on the Nature Channel that deals with mothers and their offspring in the wild. Watching the normally sweet-tempered and

docile tree sloth become a ferocious beast when it perceives a threat to its young is a bit reminiscent of the average parent's response to a school board's eliminating their precious Johnny's favorite program. Centuries of civilization, not to mention homicide laws, makes your run-of-the-mill soccer mom, a tad less violent than say a lioness when it comes to looking out for her kids. But the basic response springs from the same place. As long as the human species remains hard-wired to protect and nurture its young, we can count on coast-to-coast legion of fearsome advocates for music programs.

When it comes to advocacy, industry can't take the place of parents. Corporate initiatives are tainted by the profit motive, while parents operate out of a selfless desire to benefit their children. However, NAMM has recently produced some useful tools that can make parents even more effective advocates. Click-on to the new www.supportmusic.com website and you'll find facts, figures, and arguments that make an airtight case for school music. From how music participation boosts academic performance to how band and orchestral programs actually reduce school payroll costs, every conceivable argument, counter argument, and rebuttal is spelled out on the site. While none of the information on the site is particularly new, thanks to the internet, it's readily accessible to a huge audience for the first time ever.

School music sales represent somewhat less than 10 percent of the industry's \$6.9 billion in total revenue. However, the importance of the segment far exceeds its dollar contribution. Legions of customers who bought a guitar, sound system, keyboard, drumkit, or recording system got their first introduction to music through a school program. The fact that school music is prevalent in the U.S. and not in Europe also helps explain why U.S. per-capita music sales lead the world. For that reason, people in every segment of the music industry has a vested interest in raising awareness of www.supportmusic.com. The industry can't insulate school programs from the vagaries of municipal finances, but an army of well-equipped parents are more than up to the job.

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