

# Options for Emergency Response: A Starting Point

## Introduction

In the present climate, the unfortunate reality for many school systems is that budget deficits are growing steeper at a rate that incoming funds cannot balance. The purpose of this article is to serve as a starting point toward mounting an effective defense of budgetary funds, program breadth, and staffing. As every situation is entirely unique, this guide will give suggested mindsets, courses of action, and general recommendations for responding to a variety of adversities.

## Situation Assessment

Most importantly for any educator forced into defending their program is to remember that rash, emotional actions of any sort will likely make the situation worse, decrease credibility, and cause potential allies to discount the argument being presented. To assist with separating unproductive emotions from the defense planning process, the following questions may serve as an effective starting point:

- What cuts or reductions are being proposed?
- What reasons are being given for the cuts?
- Who are the players on both sides of the argument?
- What are the specific goals and needs of the defense?

## Data Collection

As teachers of emotive content, music educators are often excellent at “speaking from the heart.” However, while an impassioned presentation—properly focused and researched—may help the cause, it is crucial to remember that **data drives decisions**. [NAfME](#), [PMEA](#), and [NAMM](#) all have excellent resources available underneath their respective Advocacy webpages to assist in many avenues of data collection. However, in local decision making, schools, for better or worse, often look to other local districts to identify best practices over state or national statistics. To mount a truly effective defense, utilizing data from the national and state level in conjunction with local “proof of product” will create relevance to an argument that is much harder to deny. Examples might include:

- Surveying the teachers of the local PMEA district for program data of each school as it relates to the issue at hand via Google Forms
- Utilizing the [Future Ready PA Index](#) (online through the PA Department of Education website) to gather student data, school facts, enrollment reports, etc.
- Direct school-to-school comparisons of districts similar in enrollment, funding, student demographics, etc.

## Strength in Numbers

As the person or group mounting a defense, it is important to remember that it is easy to say “no” to an individual and less so for a large body of school stakeholders. Every local

school is beholden to the community that it serves. By rallying support to the defense within the school community, program cuts will be more difficult to make without justification. Ways to raise awareness and garner community support may be:

- A parent/booster organization meeting for all families within the school music program
- A social media campaign
- Asking parents to attend school board meetings and to speak during the public comment period on the benefits provided by the school music program
- A coordinated presence at a school board meeting
- Inviting the local press to attend the meeting where a public defense is taking place

### **How to Proceed**

After a thorough needs assessment, analysis of both sides of the issue at hand, data gathering, and garnering support has taken place, it may be appropriate to create a presentation or hold a meeting with school decision makers to present the defense. A calm, rational conversation or presentation backed with relevant data from the local, state, and national stages will inform the discussion and give credibility to any argument.

### **Ask For Help**

The PMEA Advocacy Council exists to promote music education across the state. This includes helping local districts to protect their programs when reductions are threatening the quality of music education in a school. For more information, assistance, or questions on “where to go from here,” reach out to the PMEA Advocacy Council at [advocacy@pmea.net](mailto:advocacy@pmea.net)