

# MAKING THE CASE FOR YOUR SCHOOL CHOIR



# AN ADVOCACY GUIDE

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# INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, America's manufacturing-driven economy is being rapidly replaced by a creative economy or "economy of ideas."<sup>1</sup> President Obama is calling for a "complete and competitive education"<sup>2</sup> for American students to ensure our place in the global economy. How do we prepare our students to meet these challenges? Arts education, of which choral singing is an integral part, is one obvious strategy.

Research shows and experience validates that singing in a choir helps students succeed not only in school, but in work and life as well. Yet, today school choral programs are under siege—competition for school dollars, time in the school day, and a narrow focus on just a few subjects covered on standardized tests all pose significant challenges to the future of school choirs, music programs, and arts education in general. In this environment, you, the school choir director, and your partners must actively and expertly advocate for your

programs every day. To make it easier, we at Chorus America offer this comprehensive advocacy guide for your use as you make the case for your school choir.

Chorus America is devoted to sustaining and advancing the whole choral field and we are especially concerned about ensuring that generations of young people don't miss out on the advantages that singing in a school choral program can deliver. Multiple studies have shown that adults who are exposed to the arts at a young age are most likely to participate in the arts throughout their entire life. Clearly, one of the most meaningful ways to carry out our mission to build a dynamic and inclusive choral community is to support choral music education in our schools. According to the National Endowment for the Arts and our own data, choral singing is by far the most popular form of participation in the performing arts and we all need to act now to keep it that way.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is offered as a tool to make it easier for you to be an effective, proactive advocate so that you can focus on your important work in the classroom.

Every school presents a unique set of challenges—and not every tool will fit your situation. Our hope is that from this compendium of resources, ideas, and suggested steps culled from the best practices of other successful advocates, you'll find something that is valuable to you and your school choir.

*Making the Case* includes:

- Advice on how to articulate the impact of your choral music program
- Ways to build meaningful relationships with partners

- Ideas for working together with your school administration
- Suggestions on how to reach out to potential collaborators in the community
- Strategies for making every performance an advocacy opportunity
- Data from notable, quotable sources that illustrate the value of singing for children

Advocating for a school choir program often begins during a crisis—when teaching positions are threatened or budget shortfalls need to be made up quickly. However, the best time to advocate for your choir program is when things are going well. Then, if crisis hits, you are not trying to convince a school board member of the importance of your program for the very first time. If that school board member heard your chorus perform when s/he was not worrying about

### What Is Advocacy?

Advocacy is speaking out about issues that you feel are important to help inform decisionmakers.


Advocacy takes place on a continuum and it can take many forms and occur at many levels including personal advocacy, advocacy for others, and advocacy in the public interest.

Advocacy includes the case, strategies, actions taken, and solutions proposed to influence decisionmaking and create positive change.

the budget shortfall, or if your superintendent welcomed the audience to the district all-state choir concert, they have already witnessed first-hand the value and discipline of choral singing and may be poised to become allies in making the case for your school choir.

Lastly, of course, meaningful change takes time. Successfully making the case for your school choir may be a long process, but the culture of choral music appreciation you build among your students, their parents, your fellow teachers, the school administration, and in the greater community, will repay your efforts and those of your partners many times over!

## THE NEED FOR ACTION

 Opportunities to participate in a school choir are declining. Chorus America's *Chorus Impact Study* reports the following key findings:

- More than 1 in 4 educators say there is no choral program in their schools and 1 in 5 parents say that there are no choral singing opportunities for their children.
- Of the educators who said that their school has no choir program today, 31% said their school used to have such a program.
- Educators told researchers that schools whose parental involvement is high are significantly more likely to have choir programs, along with several other positive effects.<sup>3</sup>

The most recent *Nation's Report Card on Music & Visual Arts* reports only 17% of eighth graders singing in choir.<sup>4</sup>

Dana Gioia, Former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, has said: "I am just old enough to remember a time when every public high school in this country had a music program with choir and band, usually a jazz band, too, sometimes even an orchestra. And every high school offered a drama program, sometimes with dance instruction. And there were writing opportunities in the school paper and literary magazine, as well as studio art training.

I am sorry to say that these programs are no longer widely available. This once visionary and democratic system has been almost entirely dismantled by well-meaning but

myopic school boards, county commissioners, and state officials, with the federal government largely indifferent to the issue. Art became an expendable luxury, and 50 million students have paid the price. Today a child's access to arts education is largely a function of his or her parents' income."<sup>5</sup>

Even though reductions in state and local budgets are considered stronger factors than the impact of the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) in reducing arts education in schools, the curriculum is narrowing. The test score is eliminating time in the school day for the choral score. *Choices, Changes, and Challenges: Curriculum and Instruction in the NCLB Era* reported that 30% of school district officials indicated that instruction time for arts education in elementary schools had decreased since NCLB was enacted.<sup>6</sup>

What makes matters worse is that those who might benefit the most are getting the least. The Government Accountability Office study *Access to Arts Education* found teachers reporting a decrease in instruction time for arts education were more likely to be at schools needing improvement and those with higher percentages of minority students.<sup>7</sup> And yet, *Champions of Change* found that the arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached<sup>8</sup> and the *Chorus Impact Study* reported that 90% of educators believe choral singing can keep some students engaged in school who might otherwise be lost—this is particularly true of educators (94%) who describe the ethnicity of their schools as diverse.<sup>9</sup>

# 1 in 4

educators say there is no choral program in their schools.

—The Chorus Impact Study

# 90%

of educators believe choral singing can keep students engaged in school.

—The Chorus Impact Study

# MAKING THE CASE FOR CHORAL MUSIC EDUCATION

**A**s advocates for your choral music program, you have at least three arrows in your quiver: **facts**, **examples**, and **evidence**. Chorus America has assembled the **facts** by collecting the results from dozens of research studies that present objective information, but the most compelling examples and evidence will likely come from your own students.

An **example** can be the story of one student's success after joining choir, or of a district's combined commitment to creating an all-district honor choir that helped raise the profile of each of the schools involved, or of your school celebrating school spirit by singing the fight song together at an assembly, or starting every morning with an all-school sing-along following the principal's announcements.

The strongest **evidence** of the importance of choral music is the work you do in your school every day. That work is most often demonstrated in performances throughout the school year, so be deliberate about making each and every performance an advocacy opportunity. Here are a few ideas that could go a long way toward cultivating a culture of proactive advocacy:

- At your concerts, introduce your students and tell the audience about what they've accomplished, or ask a student—or alumnus—to speak about what singing in your choir means to them.
- Be sure to invite your fellow teachers and school administrators (especially the guidance counselors!) to attend each and every concert and acknowledge them when they're in the audience. Not only will your fellow educators see the choral program in action, but your students will also see that their teachers support them.
- Be as organized as a college or university in tracking your alumni so that you can trumpet their success in music and the wider world.
- Be sure that your administration knows that your choirs are available to sing for school events, district meetings, school board meetings, PTA events, or teacher appreciation events.
- Are your students' parents videotaping your concerts? Invite those parents to share these clips on the school or PTA website along with some comments about how they enjoyed the concert.
- Cultivate an understanding of the importance of choral singing (and all the arts) to leading a successful life so that your students become lifelong advocates—and singers.

## FACT

Choral singing is an integral part of arts education, which is a necessary component of a complete and competitive education.

### *Singing in choir...promotes academic achievement.*

■ According to *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*, the benefits of student learning experiences in the arts are:

- **Academic:** the arts improve reading/language and mathematics skills.
- **Comprehensive:** the arts help create a learning environment conducive to teacher and student success by fostering teacher innovation, a positive professional culture, community

engagement, increased student attendance, effective instructional practice, and school identity.<sup>10</sup>

■ In *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art*, UCLA education professor James Catterall and his research team studied students in 8th grade and again at ages 20 and 26. They found that students with intensive involvement in the arts have higher levels of academic achievement and higher rates of college-going and college-completion, and that these effects were even stronger for low-income students.<sup>11</sup>

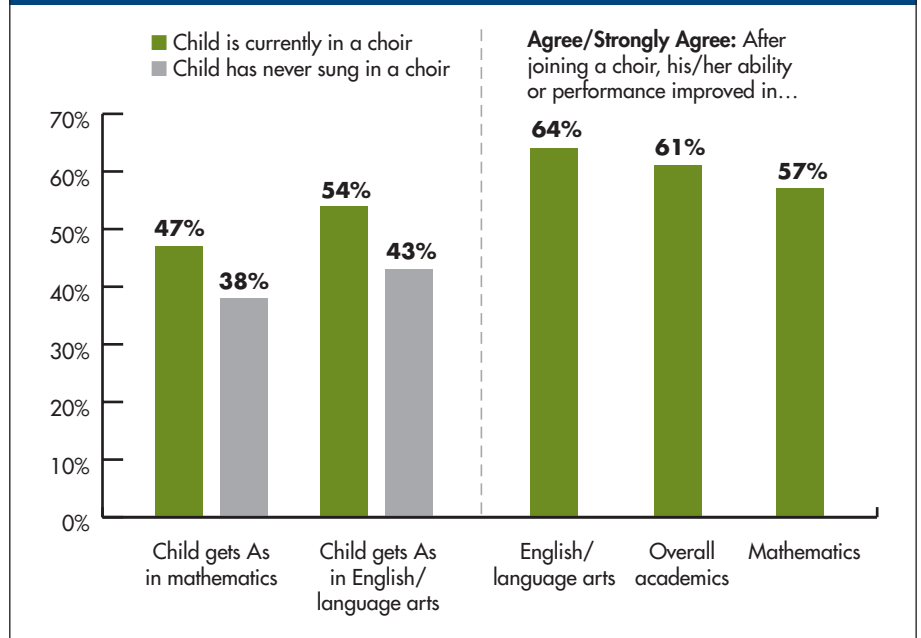
- High-arts, low-income students were nearly three times as likely to have earned BA degrees, more than twice as likely to have earned associate degrees, and nearly three times as likely to have earned masters or higher degrees than low-arts, low-income students.<sup>12</sup>
- English Language Learners (ELL) from arts-rich schools attend four-year colleges more frequently (78% vs. 58%) and are much more likely to have earned a BA degree by age 26 (58% vs. 33%) than ELL students from arts-poor schools.<sup>13</sup>

■ The 2010 report, *College-Bound Seniors* by the College Board reported SAT scores for students with arts instruction:

- Students who took four years of arts coursework outperformed their peers who had one half-year or less of arts coursework by 59 points on the verbal portion, 43 points on the math portion, and 62 points on the writing portion of the SAT.
- Moreover, students whose arts coursework was in music appreciation or music performance scored an average of 533 (appreciation)/529 (performance) on the verbal portion and 536 (appreciation)/538 (performance) on the math portion, outperforming all other arts disciplines in math scores and all but acting/play production in verbal scores.<sup>14</sup>

■ The *Chorus Impact Study* charts parents' assessment of their student's academic success<sup>15</sup>. See chart 1, above.

**Chart 1: Choir Participation and Academic Performance**



### ***Singing in choir... builds success skills.***

■ According to *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*, the benefits of student learning experiences in the arts also include these basics:

- the arts build thinking skills (reasoning ability, intuition, perception, imagination, creativity, and problem-solving);
- social skills (self-confidence, self-control, conflict resolution, empathy, and social tolerance); and
- motivation to learn (active engagement, sustained attention, persistence, and risk-taking).<sup>16</sup>

■ As reported in the executive summary of *Champions of Change: The Impact of Arts on Learning*, the key findings across seven in-depth research studies were:

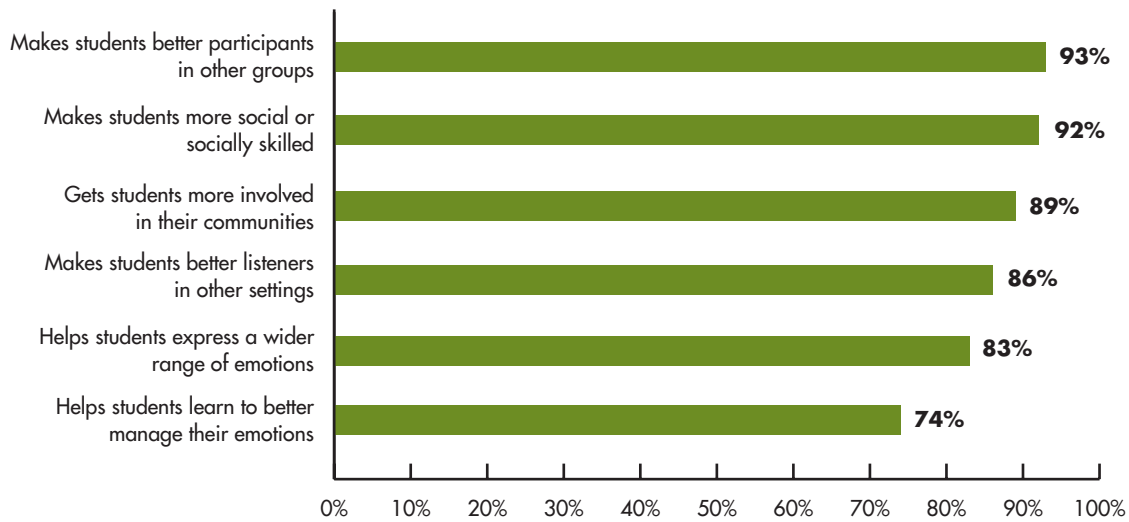
- The arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached.
- The arts reach students in ways that they are not otherwise being reached.
- The arts connect students to themselves, and each other.
- The arts transform the environment for learning.

**High-arts, low-income students were nearly three times as likely to have earned BA and MA degrees than low-arts, low-income students.**

– *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art*

## Chart 2: Educators on Student Choir Participation and Social Skills

Percent of educators who agree or strongly agree: Student choir participation...



- The arts provide learning opportunities for adults in the lives of young people.
- The arts provide new challenges for those students already considered successful.
- The arts connect learning experiences to the world of real work.<sup>17</sup>

■ The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) released an arts skills map [[http://www.p21.org/documents/P21\\_arts\\_map\\_final.pdf](http://www.p21.org/documents/P21_arts_map_final.pdf)]

that shows how arts education promotes the key 21st-century skills of critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, and innovation at 4th-, 8th- and 12th-grade levels.<sup>18</sup>

■ The *Chorus Impact Study* charts educators' assessment of students' social skills<sup>19</sup>. See chart 2, above.

# FACT

## Choral singing builds community.

***Singing in choir...provides a sense of real belonging.***

■ *Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds* reports that young people use media an average of 7.38 hours per day, and about a third of that time for music/audio purposes.<sup>20</sup> This tendency towards isolation is countered by participating in choir.

- The *Chorus Impact Study* reports that 43% of children in choirs usually watch one hour or less of television per day.<sup>21</sup>
- More people sing in choirs than participate in any other performing art according to both the NEA's *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* and the *Chorus Impact Study*, actively creating community.<sup>22</sup>

# 43%

of children in choirs usually watch one hour or less of television per day.

—The *Chorus Impact Study*

## Singing in choir...promotes student engagement.

- Most high school students feel bored and disconnected from school, according to *Charting the Path from Engagement to Achievement: A Report on the 2009 High School Survey of Student Engagement*. Only 41% of students said they attended because of what they learned in classes, yet 82% reported they wanted more opportunities to be creative.<sup>23</sup>
  - 49% of students selected arts and drama activities as the most highly favored teaching and learning methods in the same report.<sup>24</sup>
  - Former Governor Mike Huckabee: “Many kids are bored in school and have nothing there that makes them want to go. If you unlock a child’s capacity for art, whether it is visual arts, theatre, dance or music, that capacity can be the motivator for a child to make the academic grades to stay in the choir or the band. This motivator gives the child a sense of anticipation, hope and interest that otherwise he doesn’t have.”<sup>25</sup>
  - 90% of educators agree that singing in choir enhances student creativity.<sup>26</sup>
  - 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.<sup>27</sup>

- The Chorus Impact Study charts educators’ assessment of students’ school and community participation.<sup>28</sup> See chart 3, below.

## Singing in choir...offers new opportunities for learning.

- The C.S. Mott Foundation report, *New Day for Learning*, describes a whole-day approach to learning that includes many places in the community, not just schools.<sup>29</sup>
  - *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art*: “37.2% of low-income students intensively involved in the arts over the secondary school years engage in volunteer work at age 20 than the average student (27.9%).”<sup>30</sup> The level of volunteerism continues to be higher in a statistically significant way for high-arts students through age 26.<sup>31</sup>
  - 67% of educators surveyed in the *Chorus Impact Study* stated that singing in choir makes students more likely to volunteer in the community.<sup>32</sup>

## Singing in choir...addresses the need for high-quality afterschool programs.

- The 2009 Afterschool Alliance report, *America After 3PM*, stated that the number of children left alone after the

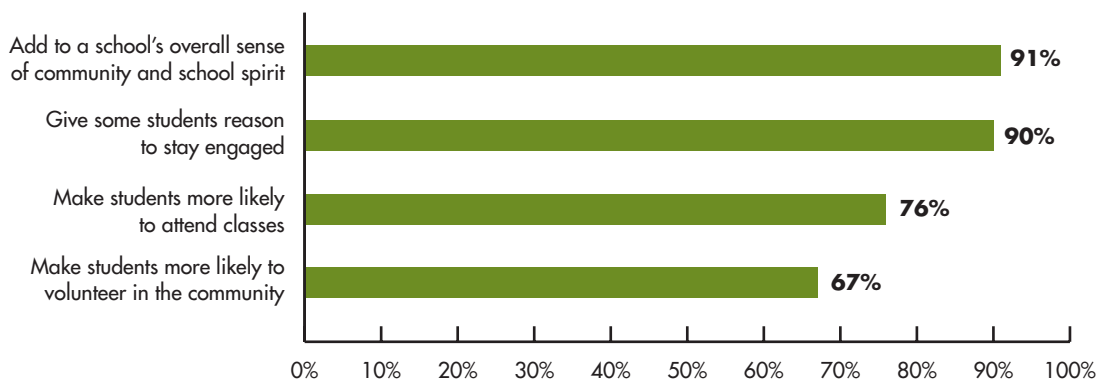
# 49%

of students selected arts and drama activities as the most highly favored teaching methods.

—2009 HSSSE

**Chart 3: Choir Participation and School, Community Participation**

Percent of educators who agree or strongly agree: Choir participation can...





school day ends has risen to more than 15 million.<sup>33</sup> A subsequent 2010 report, *From Big Cities to Small Towns*, shows the need for afterschool activities is especially acute in rural America.<sup>34</sup>

- In *All Work and No Play?*, a survey of students and parents conducted by Public Agenda, 52% of students engaged in afterschool activities were taking music, dance, or art lessons.<sup>35</sup>
- Chorus America estimates that there are approximately 1,000 independent children's and youth choirs in the U.S. and Canada that offer a safe and welcoming place for students outside the school day.

### ***Singing in choir... promotes civic engagement.***

- According to the United States Election Project, on average, 56% of the U.S. population votes in a presidential election, and only 37% in a midterm election.<sup>36</sup>
- Researchers at the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)

at Tufts University found that participation in high school performing arts led to a higher rate of voting in early adulthood.<sup>37</sup>

- In *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art*, James Catterall reports that high-arts students (at age 26) are about 15% more likely than low-arts students to register to vote, more than 30% more likely to have voted in the 1996 presidential election (most recent at time of study), and about 20% more likely to have voted in any election in the 24 months prior to the survey panel.<sup>38</sup>
- 96% of adult choral singers report voting regularly in the *Chorus Impact Study*.<sup>39</sup>

**HINT** | Distribute the **Choral Singing and Student Achievement** fact sheet as a convenient summary of the facts above, adding quotes from your own students and perhaps a quote from the President or the Secretary of Education found in **Arts Education and Student Achievement: Quotes from Influential Leaders**.

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.

– Knight Kiplinger

## **FACT**

**Choral singing has intrinsic value.**

**W**here there is human society, there will be choral singing. Choral singing is a simultaneously personal and communal expression of human experience. Choral music speaks directly to audiences with themes that are universal and timeless, poignant and prideful, painful and playful. These themes remind us of our shared humanity and serve to transcend divisions of geography, nationality, religion, ethnicity, race, and history.

Choral music naturally accommodates the remarkable diversity of human expression. It is composed to be performed with and without instruments, onstage and off, amplified and hushed. It employs various combinations of voices—high and low, male and female, adult and children's—in intimate ensembles of nuanced flexibility and massive forces of breathtaking magnitude and power.

The opportunity to participate together in making music that speaks to universal themes connects us to our fellow humans and provides a means of expressing something greater than ourselves.

Consider these quotes from thoughtful leaders in education, entertainment, and business:

- “It’s time to assert choral music’s rightful place as the noblest—and socially most important—of all the performing arts... 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*<sup>40</sup>
- “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. The biggest loss may simply be the chance to participate in a guided way with music to learn how music is made, to try making music, to learn about the infinite ways that music comes to us and to learn about music’s connections to events and eras of our history...Serious losses would attach to the loss of children’s opportunities to learn to perform music to play [an instrument] or to sing with tutored skills.” – James Catterall, Professor, UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies<sup>41</sup>
- “From imagination to social responsibility, the arts teach our children about what it is to be human and enable them to experience their humanity in thought and in action.” –Jessica Hoffmann Davis, Founding Director, Arts in Education Program, Harvard University Graduate School of Education
- “To sing in the company of other souls, and to make those consonants slip out so easily and in unison, and to make those chords so rich that they bring tears to your eyes! This is transcendence. This is the power that choral singing has that other music can only dream of.” – Garrison Keillor, humorist, author, and host of *A Prairie Home Companion*<sup>43</sup>

**HINT** | Use the **Comparative Advantages of Choruses** case statement.

## THE COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES OF CHORUSES

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>1</b>   <b>Everyone has a voice.</b></p> <p><b>2</b>   <b>That voice comes free</b> – no purchases necessary.</p> <p><b>3</b>   <b>That voice is portable</b> – no special travel requirements.</p> <p><b>4</b>   <b>That voice is highly flexible</b> – all music can be sung.</p> <p><b>5</b>   <b>Choral music has rhythms and words.</b> Reading, counting, comprehension, foreign languages, expression...we’ve got it all.</p> | <p><b>6</b>   <b>Choral music has messages and meaning.</b> From discovering folk traditions and world music to singing about social justice and civil rights, choral music provides a powerful means of cultural and historical expression... we sing <i>about</i> something.</p> <p><b>7</b>   <b>Choral singing is a collaborative endeavor...</b> we sing together.</p> | <p><b>8</b>   <b>Choral singing can be taught in ways that work for all kinds of learners.</b></p> <p><b>9</b>   <b>Choral singing is a very cost-effective form of arts education.</b></p> <p><b>10</b>   <b>Choral singing is a lifelong activity.</b> There are nearly 300,000 choruses in communities large and small eager to welcome your singers at any age!</p> |
|--|---|---|

# WHAT YOU CAN DO

## Assess Your Situation: Stop, Look & Listen!

- **Stop** and create a space to think about the work that you do with your choir(s) as part of the greater fabric of your music department, your school, your community, and beyond.

**HINT** | Actually reserve time on your calendar and be sure to document your work.

- **Look** around at the current state of your choral program. Identify the most pressing issues you are facing. *See sidebar, right.*

**HINT** | Try this twice. The second time, imagine yourself as a neutral, outside observer sent to evaluate the program.

- **Listen** to your colleagues: fellow music/arts teachers, fellow teachers in all disciplines, administrators, guidance counselors, parents, and community members. What do they think about your program and what are their needs or priorities? *See sidebar, right.*

**HINT** | Building relationships is the key element in a successful advocacy campaign.

## Define Your Goal: What Does Success Look Like?

- Every school can expand or improve its choral offerings. But what is the highest priority for your community? Improving the quality of performances? Providing more communal singing opportunities for the entire school (e.g. a ‘morning sing’ at assemblies or singing following morning announcements)? Involving students who have been left out? Securing or improving rehearsal and performance space? Helping your students secure music scholarships for college? Involving more parents in

### Some Look Questions:

- ▶ Is discipline/classroom management an issue?
- ▶ Are you teaching at multiple schools? Is the situation at each school similar or different?
- ▶ How are students enrolled in choir? Is enrollment increasing or decreasing—why?
- ▶ Is your program curricular, co-curricular, extracurricular, or all three?
- ▶ Has NCLB squeezed your instruction time or is another issue of greater concern?
- ▶ Are your facilities adequate?
- ▶ Is your principal supportive of the arts? Does your district have an arts supervisor?
- ▶ Does your overall school culture value the arts? Are there any communal singing opportunities in the school beyond your choir(s)?
- ▶ How is your school performing on standardized tests and other evaluation criteria?
- ▶ What is the actual size of the resource pie? When is the budgeting cycle for your school?
- ▶ Who makes the decisions about scheduling?

- ▶ Who comes to your concerts?
- ▶ What is the profile of your choral program within the school community? What is the profile of your choral program within the local community?

### Some Listen Questions:

- ▶ What are your administration’s priorities? How can your choral program advance those priorities?
- ▶ What do your fellow music teachers in the district need? Are those needs the same as yours?
- ▶ What do the parents of your students tell you about their children’s involvement in your choir/class?
- ▶ Who is equally as passionate as you are about the value of choral music education?
- ▶ Do you work with any teaching artists or other community choral leaders? What is their perspective on the current situation at your school?
- ▶ What do your fellow teachers in science, history, or P. E. think about your program and its value?

their children’s activities? Increasing access for children with disabilities? Broadening the repertoire to reflect greater cultural diversity? Increasing the level of challenge for the current students? Increasing the visibility of the choral program in the school and local community?

**HINT** | More funding is not what success looks like. What that funding will accomplish is what success looks like.

- Consider collaboration. Choral music education is an integral part of arts education and there is strength in numbers. In elementary schools, work with classroom teachers to incorporate mnemonic songs into lessons plans across the curriculum. At the high school level, producing a musical is one way to involve students from multiple arts disciplines in a shared project. Athletic programs already know how to partner with community-based sports programs to build skills and recruit for school teams; you can accomplish precisely the same thing with independent children's choruses in your area. Draw on their resources, whether sheet music, conductors trained in pedagogy, or the young singers themselves, to build a mutually beneficial relationship outside school walls.

**HINT** | Use the **Choir Partnerships** tool.

- Or perhaps your goal is a more comprehensive set of music and arts learning programs within your district? Or ensuring that choral music is included in a cross-curricular arts-integration project being developed to apply for federal funding (such as the DOE "Investing in Innovation" initiative)? Effective partnerships can make all of these ideas into reality.

**HINT** | Document your goals and measure your progress! As the saying goes, what gets measured gets done.

### **Gather Vocal Supporters: Who Will Help?**

Complete the **Build Your Network** worksheet (*right*) to identify specific individuals who will not only start, but help sustain, your advocacy effort. You have many different potential partners!

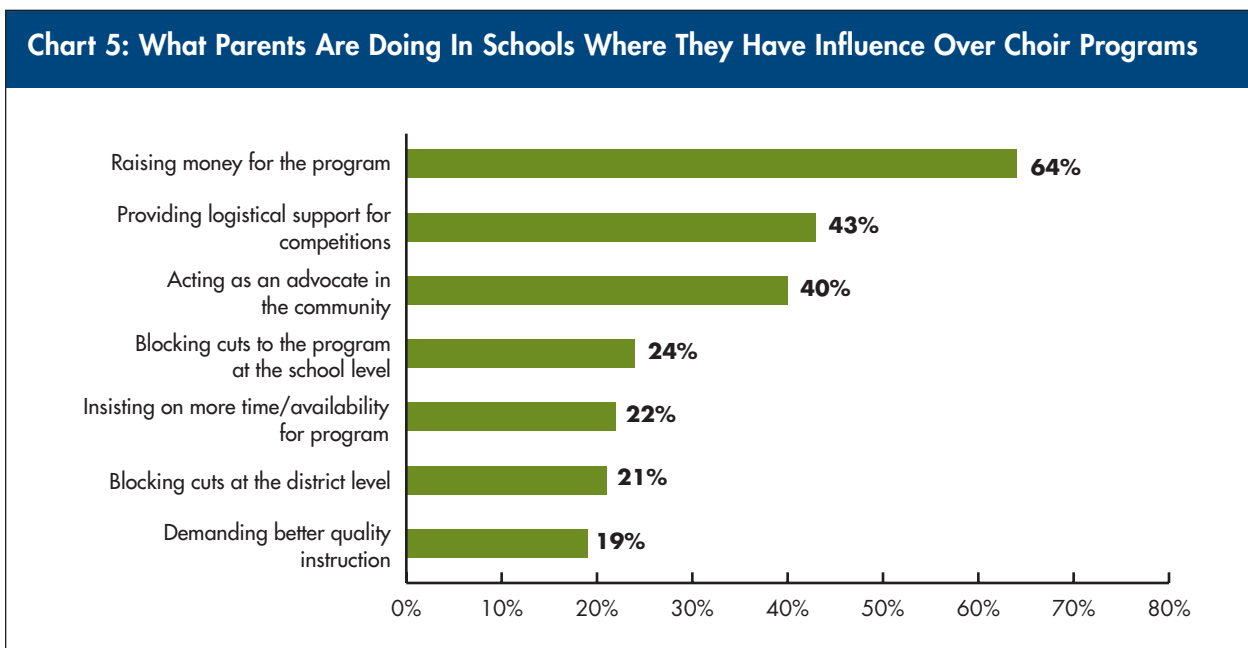
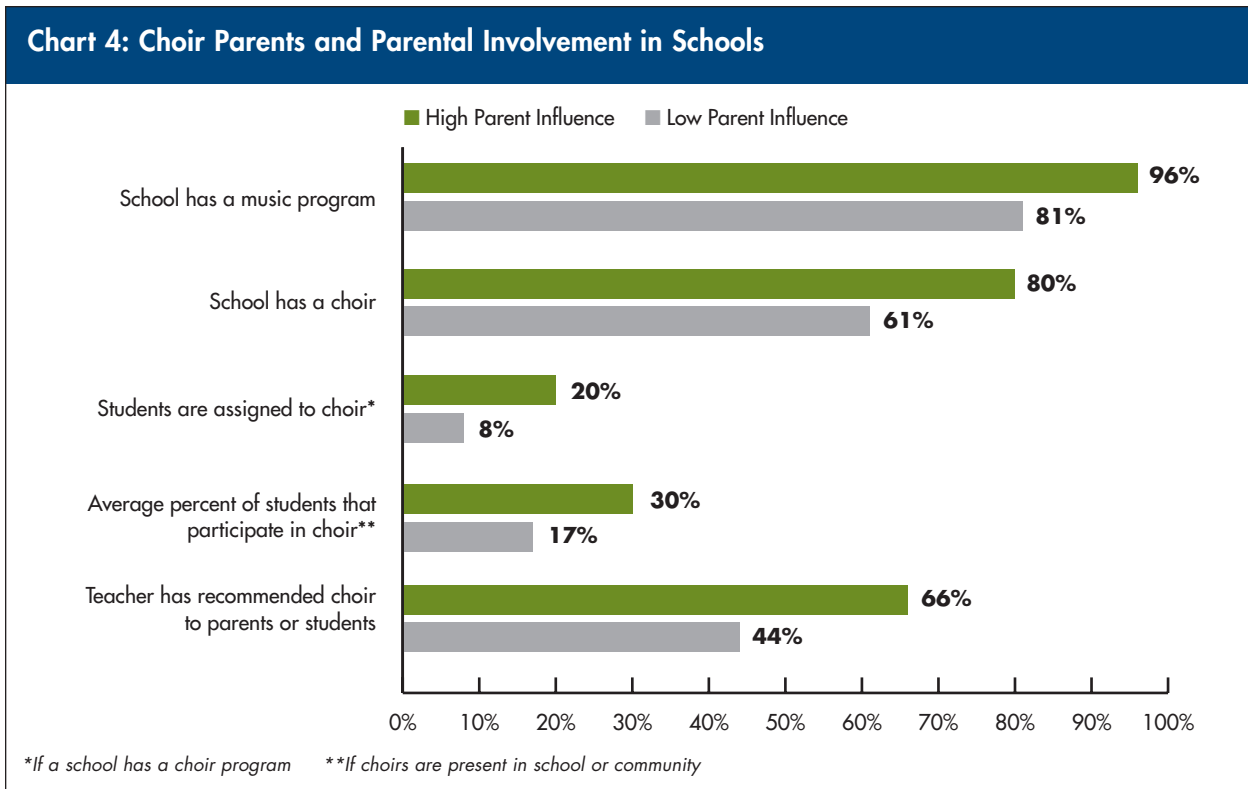
- **Students:** They can be the most eloquent, effective, and authentic advocates. For example, see the Young People's Chorus of New York City singers on this "behind the scenes" video [<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/fromthetop/video/season-2/207.php>].

## **BUILD YOUR NETWORK**

1. Name one fellow teacher you know who values choruses as much as you do.
2. Name the band and orchestra director(s) at your school.
3. Name your most engaged male student.
4. Name your most engaged female student.
5. Name any additional students who you think have a particularly compelling story about why they sing in your choir.
6. Name two alumni of your choir who are still active in music.
7. Name the school guidance counselor(s).
8. Name one parent/grandparent you know who is actively engaged with the PTA.
9. Name one parent/grandparent you know who is a music booster.
10. Name two parents/grandparents of students you know who are not actively engaged with the school but who have been impressed with your choral program.
11. Name one school administrator who you know personally.
12. Name that school administrator's boss.
13. Name one member of the school board who supports the arts.
14. Name one person you know who has a connection to some form of media (newspaper, blog, radio station, education journal, local college/university newspaper, commercial television station, in-school cable station, community cable station, etc.).
15. Name one or two people you know in the community who have heard your chorus perform (who are not parents, but may be community leaders in some way – Scout leaders, members of Rotary Club/Kiwanis/Lions/Shriners, business leaders, city council members, etc.).
16. Name one person you know who provides private voice instruction in the community.
17. Name one person you know who is a choral director at the college/university level in your community.
18. Name one person you know who is involved in running an independent chorus in your community for youth or adults.

Some of the answers may be left blank; those form your priorities for further investigation as you begin building your choral music network.

- **Choir alumni:** They can provide evidence of the positive intrinsic and academic benefits of choral music education.
- **Parents and adult caregivers:** The data in Charts 4 and 5 below speaks for itself.<sup>44</sup>
- **Educators:** Collaborating with your fellow teachers to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes, rather than pitting your choral program against their programs, will lead to longer-term success.



- **Administrators and guidance counselors:** Building relationships with those who hold the keys to questions about scheduling, funding, and enrollment is vital.
- **Community choral leaders:** They fully appreciate the value of the choral singing experience and know that the success of your school choral program is key to the continued success (and survival) of their

community chorus. Partnerships with independent children’s choirs can be particularly beneficial.

- **Community leaders:** Look beyond the usual suspects. For example, consider participation by public safety officials—they are community-minded individuals who want healthy and safe growth opportunities for children and youth, too.

## DEVELOP YOUR ACTION PLAN: WHAT’S FIRST?

**N**ow that you’ve collected facts, examples, and evidence to make the case for your choral program, assessed the situation, defined your goal, and identified the people you want to involve, the first action step is to develop your “elevator speech.” You need to present your case in both professional and personal terms. Craft a simple, succinct statement that can be delivered in the proverbial time of an elevator ride. The statement should cover the following:

- ▶ Our school has these needs...
- ▶ Choral music education addresses these needs by...
- ▶ Choral singing is important in children’s lives because...

Perhaps even more important than identifying the needs is identifying how choral music addresses the needs. Administrators and other leaders will want to help, but receiving a laundry list of demands will not inspire them—create a positive, fact-based, persuasive argument that suggests possible solutions.

Then you’re ready for the tactical next steps that will form your action plan. Complete the **Action Plan Matrix** to identify the ‘What-How-Why-Who’ and especially the ‘By When’ for each action step you list. (See *sample Action Plan Matrix, next page*). Use the **Making the Case PowerPoint Presentation** as a ready-made presentation template. And distribute **Making the Case for Your Child’s School Choir: A Parent’s Advocacy Guide** to your interested parents, a version of this toolkit tailored to their specific needs.

### *Monitor Your Progress: What’s Next?*

Don’t let your plan sit on a shelf once it’s finished! Put the deadlines into your calendar and set automatic reminders. Use tools such as Google Docs so that you and your fellow advocates may update progress independently, but also schedule team meetings in advance to maintain your momentum. Don’t be discouraged by slow progress—sustainable change *can be* slow. It helps to set attainable goals with realistic timeframes and to share your progress as you go to inspire colleagues and collaborators.

### *Celebrate Your Success*

Call out your progress in public ways recognize volunteers or helpful administrators at your concerts, educate your audiences about your successes, keep a blog to document and publicize your progress. Include an all-school sing-along in the next assembly or pep rally. Post YouTube videos publicly thanking members of the school board, ask your students to hand-write thank-you notes to advocates or administrators, offer private concerts as thank-you events if appropriate. Be creative!

Your “elevator speech” should include the following:

- ▶ Our school has these needs...
- ▶ Choral music education addresses these needs by...
- ▶ Choral singing is important in children’s lives because...

## EXAMPLE: ACTION PLAN MATRIX

	<b>ACTION STEP – EXAMPLE 1</b>	<b>ACTION STEP – EXAMPLE 2</b>
<b>What is the action step?</b>	Protect funding for school choir	Start a “Morning Sing” at the all-school assembly.
<b>Who is your target audience?</b> Focus on key targets: Who controls time and dollars?	School board member	Principal
<b>What do you know about your target audience?</b> List anything that will help as you approach them for support.	Works in the banking industry; son graduated hs 4 years ago, played in band; known as an independent thinker on the board.	Each assembly is tightly-scheduled; the principal is always looking for ways to build community within the school.
<b>What does your target audience need to know or learn?</b> Everyone should hear the elevator speech. Then, what part of your case do you most need to make? What facts will compel them?	Specific impact of choral program; data and research rather than intrinsic argument	Singing together doesn’t necessarily require any additional set-up and won’t take much time.
<b>How will your target audience want to be informed or taught?</b> Using facts? Evidence? Examples? All three?	Facts and examples	A ready-made solution; prepare a mocked-up schedule of an assembly that includes a “morning sing”
<b>What approach will be most effective with your target audience?</b> Informal conversation? Formal private presentation? Formal group presentation, e.g. at PTA or school board meeting? Detailed email? Petition? Invitation to a concert or to observe a lesson?	Email request for a meeting; formal private presentation	Talk to the other teachers usually involved in the assembly to get buy-in; then meet with the principal in person.
<b>What will your target audience be asked to do?</b> Be as specific as possible.	Vote against a measure before the school board that would eliminate FTE elementary music and FTE middle school choral positions.	Spare 10 minutes for an all-school sing-along during assembly; endorse the concept from stage; sing along heartily
<b>What will be the primary concern of your target audience?</b> Resource allocation? Accountability? Setting precedent? Make sure your FAQs address these concerns!	Costs; justifying the decision to save music positions	Time; balancing requests from many departments; secular v. sacred considerations; ensuring success
<b>Who will contact your target audience?</b>	Me	Music department teachers
<b>By when will contact be made?</b>	March 15	Before the end of the school year in preparation for the next year.
<b>What tools from <i>Making the Case</i> will be most useful?</b>	<i>Making the Case</i> PowerPoint presentation	The “Choral Singing Builds Community” facts

# TOOLS AND RESOURCES

**M**aking the Case is just one tool in your toolkit. We've developed several additional tools that you can download separately from [www.chorusamerica.org/choiradvocacyguide/free](http://www.chorusamerica.org/choiradvocacyguide/free) (or the Chorus America members-only section). These include:

- **Choral Singing and Student Achievement**, a one-page, data-driven summary handout that focuses on the benefits of singing in choir for students
- **Comparative Advantages of Choruses**, a ready-made case statement
- **Choir Partnerships Between School and Independent Youth Choirs**, examples of creative and mutually beneficial resource-sharing partnerships
- **Arts Education and Student Achievement: Quotes from Influential Leaders**, a collection of inspiring quotes about the value of arts education from government officials to help with case-making
- **Making the Case for Your Child's School Choir: A Parent's Advocacy Guide**, a brief, tailored version of the case for parents to use in advocating on your choir's behalf
- **Making the Case for Your Choir: A PowerPoint Presentation**, ready for you to customize with pictures of your own choir and quotes from your own students, before presenting to the school board, PTA, or your advocacy network

You may also download these two worksheets separately so that you can put them to use:

- **Build Your Network** worksheet
- **Action Plan Matrix**

One of the most important resources from *Making the Case* is the **Annotated Bibliography** available on the website. Not only does it include complete citations for

a wealth of resources related to arts education, research, and case-making materials, but we've also provided the actual PDF versions of every study cited in *Making the Case* to save you time and effort. We expect the regional resource section to grow, so be sure to submit studies or research you may already use that we may have missed, and check back often to take advantage of this convenient reference library.

Moreover, invaluable samples, guides, and tools have been developed by our fellow service organizations who are dedicated to protecting choruses, music programs, and arts education in schools across the country. Here are some links to more help (reference the **Annotated Bibliography** for even more):

- **Americans for the Arts** provides sample letters to 17 decisionmakers from a teacher to a Congress member as part of their *Arts: Ask for More* campaign: [http://www.americansforthearts.org/public\\_awareness/get\\_involved/003.asp](http://www.americansforthearts.org/public_awareness/get_involved/003.asp)
- **The National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM)** has developed the Community Action Kit that includes a number of excellent resources, including "The Advocate's Plan" PowerPoint presentation: <http://www.nammfoundation.org/support-music/community-action-kit>
- **The National Association of State Arts Agencies (NASAA)** has developed an extensive, research-based advocacy guide, which includes a wealth of templates. Check out the sample letter to a superintendent in Part III, page 70: <http://www.nasaa-arts.org/Research/Key-Topics/Arts-Education/rbc-toolkit-section3.pdf>
- **The National Association for Music Education (MENC)** maintains an exhaustive database of research and quotes, the "Make Your Case Database": <http://www.menc.org/resources/view/music-education-advocacy-central>

Be sure to use the **Annotated Bibliography**—more than 40 additional resources from which to draw.

[www.chorusamerica.org/choiradvocacyguide/free](http://www.chorusamerica.org/choiradvocacyguide/free)



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# ABOUT CHORUS AMERICA

**C**horus America's mission is to build a dynamic and inclusive choral community so that more people are transformed by the beauty and power of choral singing. Chorus America strengthens choruses and provides their leaders with information, research, professional development, and advocacy to help them serve their communities and advance the choral art.

Chorus America's work is supported by membership dues and registration fees, and by generous gifts from individuals, private

foundations, businesses, and government support. Members include choruses of every kind, individuals associated with choruses, and businesses that work with choruses. Chorus America is headquartered in Washington, DC and is governed by a board of directors from across North America.

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