

Texas Music Educators Association: The Art of Legislating Arts Education

How can an arts advocacy organization achieve its goals by shaping legislative and school board policy at the state level? Founded in 1920, the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) serves music educators and students throughout the state, counting political advocacy and lobbying among its principal activities. In 2003, TMEA achieved a meaningful legislative victory—the passage and implementation of Senate Bill 815—through a multi-year struggle to mandate standards-driven music education in all districts. This case describes the journey to pass this legislation, as well as TMEA Executive Director Robert Floyd’s lessons learned through lobbying for arts education. The study highlights the continuing role of TMEA as an advocate for arts education, exploring the possibility of future legislation to further secure a strong position for quality arts curriculum in Texas schools.



This case study was prepared by Phil Pierick. *The Eastman Case Studies* are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements or sources of primary data nor are they to serve as illustrations of effective or ineffective leadership or decision making.

Background

The Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) was founded by amateur bandleader James E. King in 1920 as the Texas Band Teachers Association, acquiring its current title in 1938. What began as a small group of community band directors has grown to an active membership of nearly 12,000 music educators of all stripes a century later. Today, TMEA represents band, orchestra, vocal, elementary, and college music educators from the Lone Star State.

Through its activities, TMEA aims to garner support for music in public and private schools and to provide students with high-level musical experiences, setting the stage for their lifelong involvement in music. The organization offers professional development opportunities for learners and educators alike. Not long after its initial efforts in the service of municipal bands, TMEA assumed a broad educational focus as formal music instruction increased in Texas public schools. One of the country's oldest and most robust state music education associations, TMEA traces its advocacy for music education in the public schools back to the 1930s, when it worked to secure academic credit for students who played in public school bands. Early efforts by the organization to convince the state's department of education to recognize instrumental music as part of the general curriculum were quashed with the rationale that uniform instruction throughout the state was impossible without the use of a textbook for music ensembles.

By 1960, the power and influence of TMEA on music education was on firmer ground. Coinciding with widespread national attention to formalize curriculum matters by the 1960s, TMEA was heavily involved in the development of music education curricula at all levels of education for the next two decades. TMEA worked closely with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and school administrators, undertaking studies of music curricula, teacher load

standards, music teacher education requirements, "non-performance" music education, and revisions of accreditation standards. TMEA ultimately offered numerous recommendations to the TEA and played a large role in crafting music education policy in Texas in the second half of the twentieth century.

Today, TMEA has expanded its advocacy profile even further. It provides scholarships for post-secondary study, supplies pedagogical and activist resources for members, publishes a periodical for its members (*Southwestern Musician*), and oversees Texas All-State and All-Region ensembles, established in 1932. The selection process for Texas All-State begins with more than 64,000 high school students throughout the state who aim for a spot in one of fifteen ensembles (bands, orchestras, or choirs). Approximately 1,700 students are chosen to perform in these ensembles, whose marquee concerts conclude the TMEA Clinic/Convention each February. This annual meeting of music educators in San Antonio is consistently the largest event of its kind in the nation. Each February, nearly 30,000 people attend the TMEA Clinic/Convention, visiting more than 300 workshops, 1,300 exhibit booths, and 100 performances over four days. The event is an indispensable point of exchange for Texas music educators, where continuing education, networking, and new ideas are brought to the forefront of the profession.

Shaping Legislation

Apart from the bustle of the annual convention, TMEA has long held the belief that arts education must be protected in state law and rule in order to win advocacy battles at the district and campus level. To this end, TMEA regularly monitors political activity surrounding arts education in the state legislature of Texas and the State Board of Education (SBOE). Building on its long history of shaping curriculum and policy for music education at the state level, TMEA observes and lobbies these organizations on behalf