



CHORUS IMPACT STUDY TOOL

PARENT GUIDE: ADVOCATING FOR CHORUSES IN YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

Why?

Why should parents advocate for choral music programs in schools? The benefits of incorporating the arts into children's education have been well documented. Now, a new study from Chorus America supports these previous findings and also adds a new perspective on the benefits of choral singing specifically. (Much of the research about the value of music education has focused on instrumental music—this new research helps fill that research gap.)

The goal of this guide is to aid parents and choral leaders in building a solid case for having choral music as part of the school curriculum. Use this information to encourage school boards and administrators to begin, revive, or expand choral singing programs.

There are three primary reasons for encouraging parent advocacy:

1. Singing in a chorus is good for children in school and can help them in the future

Chorus America first evaluated the benefits of choral singing and its impact on communities in a 2003 study. The data indicated that an early introduction to choral singing is a building block for life-long learning and social success. The study found that choral singers exhibit increased social skills, civic involvement, volunteerism, philanthropy, and support of other art forms, versus non-singers. The vast majority of adult choral singers today began singing in elementary and middle school.

In 2009, Chorus America conducted a follow-up study that included a component exploring the value of singing for children. The results show that children who sing have academic success and valuable life skills. Children who sing in choruses display many of the enhanced social skills found in adult singers, substantiating earlier conclusions that singing in childhood is likely to have an enormous influence on the choices individuals make later in life.

2. The decline in choral singing opportunities for children and youth is a concern

- a. There are approximately 10.1 million American children singing in choruses today.
- b. One in five parents say there are no choir opportunities for their child in their child's school or local community.
- c. More than one in four educators say there is no choir program in their schools.

Schools have been a primary source of free opportunities to sing in choruses—as many parents say the reason their child is not in a choir is because their school has no program (20%) as say there are no choral opportunities for their child at all. Of the educators who said that their school has no choral music program today, nearly a third (31%) said their school used to have such a program.

3. Parent involvement is the key!

Educators report that schools *where parental involvement is high* are:

- a. Significantly more likely to have music programs than schools where parental influence is low (96% vs. 81%).
- b. Significantly more likely to have choral music programs than low parental influence schools (80% vs. 60%).
- c. Significantly more likely to assign students to choirs, rather than just let them elect to join (20% vs. 8%).
- d. Have significantly higher proportions of students involved in choirs (30% vs. 17%).

How?

Here are five clear steps to help you advocate for funding a chorus in your child's school:

1. **Familiarize yourself with the data.** The sampling of research findings in this guide are just a small part of the positive information obtained in the 2009 *Chorus Impact Study*. School boards and administrators will be interested in understanding these facts and statistics that illustrate clearly the impact participation in choral singing has on learning and childhood development.
2. **Recruit other parents and music educators to help you build and deliver the business case for arts funding.** Call your child's school to find out who are the performing arts teachers in your district. Alternatively, most school districts have websites that list school directories.
3. **Identify forums where decisions are made, such as PTA and school board meetings, and get on their agenda to present your case.** School district websites are an invaluable source of information about when meetings occur and how to get involved.
4. **Follow up with school board members and administrators.** Make personal appointments with school leaders to further discuss this critical issue and obtain commitments for funding.
5. **Contact Chorus America to ask questions, solicit advice, and to let us know the outcome of your efforts.**

What? (Making the Case)

Choral singing is a beautiful, participatory, and accessible art form: Choral music is the most popular form of public participation in the arts—about one in five people in the U.S. participate regularly in a community chorus or a school or church choir. The broad appeal of choral singing is based in the unsurpassed opportunity it gives each singer to participate in an activity that involves them artistically, builds community, enhances their skills, and results in a product of great beauty. In working toward a beautiful choral sound, singers contribute to an artistic product greater than themselves and forge friendships that change the course of their lives. When exposed early, children are far more likely to stay involved with choral singing throughout their lives.

Choral singing provides an extraordinarily accessible entry point for arts exposure, with fewer barriers to participation—economic, cultural, and educational—than those posed by other art forms. The voice is a readily available instrument! Furthermore, the costs to establish a choir tend to be lower than for other instrumental music programs.

A variety of facts and statistics support the value of choral singing for children and youth: Chorus America's *Chorus Impact Study* (2009) involved national panels of educators (from a wide range of academic subjects) and parents who completed an online survey. In sum, the research found that students who participate in chorus are:

1. More successful academically.
2. Have greater social skills and emotional intelligence.

And that:

3. Parents and teachers both agree on the benefits of choral singing for children by virtually every measure.

Statistics that support these findings are as follows:

1. Academic Improvement

Children who participate in a chorus get significantly better grades than children who have never sung in a choir.

- a. **Higher Grades:** 45% of parents whose children sing state their child receives "All or Mostly A's" in mathematics (vs. 38% of non-choir parents).
- b. **Achievement in Language Arts:** 54% of parents state their child gets "All or Mostly A's" in English and other language arts classes (vs. 43%).

Parents report academic improvement after their child joined a chorus:

- a. **Overall Academic Improvement:** 61% say their child's overall academic performance improved after he or she became a member of a chorus.
- b. **Language Arts Skills:** 64% of parents whose children currently sing in a chorus say their child's ability or performance in English/language arts improved since joining a chorus.
- c. **Math:** 57% say their child's ability or performance in math improved.

2. Social Skills and Emotional Intelligence

The majority of parents surveyed stated that multiple social skills and emotional development increased after their child joined a chorus:

- a. **Self-Confidence:** 71% say their child has become more self-confident.
- b. **Practice:** 71% say their child has become better at practicing in other (non-chorus) activities.
- c. **Self-Discipline:** 70% say their child's self-discipline has improved.
- d. **Problem Solving:** 67% say their child has become better at problem solving.
- e. **Participation in Sports:** 64% of children currently in choir also regularly participate in one or more sports either in or out of school.
- f. **Physical Fitness:** 53% say their child has gotten in better physical condition.

When compared to children who do not participate in a chorus, those who sing outpace their peers on multiple dimensions:

- a. **Creativity:** 90% of parents whose children are in choir say their children are (Very Creative) versus 72% of parents whose children do not sing in a choir.
- b. **Self-Esteem:** 86% of choir parents state their child has a strong sense of self-worth and self-esteem (vs. 63%).
- c. **Memory skills:** 82% of choir parents report their child has a (Very Good) memory (vs. 68%).

3. Furthermore, Teachers Agree!

Educators—**across multiple academic disciplines**—agree with parent assessments of singing children:

- a. **Keeping Students Engaged:** 90% of educators believe choir 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.
- b. **Self-Confidence:** 94% of teachers believe that singing in a choir can enhance a child's self-confidence.
- c. **Memory Skills:** 93% of teachers say choir participation can enhance a child's memory skills.
- d. **Creativity:** 90% say choral singing can enhance student creativity.
- e. **Practice Habits:** 90% also say that singing in a choir can instill efficient and effective practice habits in children.
- f. **Academic Performance:** 88% say singing in a choir can improve a child's overall academic performance.
- g. **Social Development:** 80% of educators say that choir participation can enhance numerous aspects of a child's social development and academic success.
- h. **Group Participation:** Educators (93%) reported that children who sing are better participants in group activities, have better emotional expression, and exhibit better emotional management.

Additional Resources

Here is a list of online resources from other national organizations involved in advocating for the performing arts in America's schools. They have a wealth of information and tools you can use to build your case and approach decisionmakers at your school and in your community. *Good luck and thank you for being part of this effort!*

The Performing Arts Alliance online information on arts education:

http://theperformingartsalliance.org/performingarts/arts_ed_issue_center.html

Arts Education Partnership (a coalition of partners representing the many diverse methodologies and approaches working collectively to reach the goal of an excellent arts education for every child):

<http://www.aep-arts.org/>

A list of the member organizations of the Arts Education Partnership Legislative Working Group. These are leading participants in the federal national policy discussions regarding arts education:

<http://www.aep-arts.org/aboutus/organizations.htm>

State policy database. State and local level action is most important for arts education advocacy:

<http://www.aep-arts.org/database/?PHPSESSID=48f124c4c4b4cc867a19b38a83299d00>

“Critical Evidence: How the arts benefit student achievement (2006)” A useful aggregate of some of the best talking points from a variety of sources:

http://www.aep-arts.org/publications/info.htm?publication_id=31

Community Arts Network—Reading Room. A series of updated essays about Arts and Education nationally:

http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/education_all2/index.php

The Arts Education Collaborative: <http://www.artsedcollaborative.org>

“*Cultivating Demand for the Arts*,” a study from the Wallace Foundation and Rand Corporation:
<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/WF/Knowledge%20Center/Attachments/PDF/cultivating-demand-for-the-arts.pdf>

Americans for the Arts and State Alliances for Arts Education (Kennedy Center Network) have excellent and current online materials:

http://www.artsusa.org/networks/arts_education/arts_education_004.asp , <http://www.kennedy-center.org/education/kcaen/>

http://www.americansforthearts.org/get_involved/advocacy/aad/handbook/2009.asp

The League of American Orchestras’ Statement of Common Cause in Support of In-School Music Education. This statement addresses responsible advocacy, and can be expanded to serve all types of performing arts in schools:

http://www.americanorchestras.org/advocacy_and_government/music_ed_advocates.html

President Obama’s Preliminary Fact Sheet for the Arts:

http://www.performingartsconvention.org/pdf/Obama_FactSheet_Arts.pdf

Wynton Marsalis: Transcript of speech to encourage Congress to support more funding for the arts. Nancy Hanks Lecture, March 31, 2009:

<http://www.wyntonmarsalis.org/2009/04/03/transcript-from-wyntons-speech-at-nancy-hanks-lecture/>

Supportmusic.com - a valuable resource for advocacy and best practices in music education, with many links to other resources: <http://www.supportmusic.com/>

Fender Music Foundation—a list of articles promoting the benefits of music education in schools:

<http://www.fendermusicfoundation.org/musicBin/index.cfm?sec=articles>