I. Rationale

With budget constraints and cuts in government spending, school officials are left with the tough decision of which courses to keep in the curriculum and which courses to eliminate. With the emphasis on “passing the tests”, music educators, now more than ever, must define their role and how their particular subject is essential to the curriculum. In order to advocate their subject, music educators have begun to cite the National Standards for Music as a way of keeping their courses in the curriculum. However, many of the same educators have plodded down the same track.

To combat the two phenomena of economy and education reform, advocacy groups have manipulated data of unfounded truths, such as music would benefit the future intelligence and success of a child as he/she matures. Blakeslee states that the “operational arguments”, showing that the arts enhances math, English, and science, as well as the legal arguments defining the arts as a “core academic subject” (No Child Left Behind, 2001) would increase the resources available to the arts. Unfortunately, funding for the arts continues to decrease (MENC).

The task to show efficacy is not easy. While educational goals of a given class are usually clear, many arts classes sometimes lack defined learning outcomes. Performance groups, for example, may lead to questions of measurable educational value if educators do not focus on formulating a policy for arts education to bring a value of measurement to the art in school.
Using the National Standards for Music as an evaluation tool is fair for all music educators. The Standards’ descriptions for educational outcomes lend credibility to the program’s weight in the curriculum. Educators must ask a series of questions to establish the arts program validity. First, are students expected to reach the very high achievements suggested in the standards? Second, what breadth of coverage of the standards has taken place? Third, what percentage of the student body does the educator expect to reach in the program? (Blakeslee) Using these questions would give administrators and the public a better basis for support of arts education.

II. History

In 1992, the National Council on Educational Standards and Testing called for a voluntary set of national standards in math, English, science, history, and geography, “with other subjects to follow.” (MENC) The arts were the first “other” subject to receive funding from the government. From 1992 to 1994, The National Association for Music Education received a total of $1 million from the Department of Education, and other agencies to develop standards in the four disciplines – music, visual arts, theatre, and dance. For each discipline, the standards considered the diversity of cultural backgrounds, children with disabilities, and technology. The Council continued to meet with the “core” curriculum leaders so there would be consistency among each subject’s standards. The format is organized by three grade levels: K-4, 5-8, and 9-12. All four disciplines suggest possibilities for subject integration.
III. Summary

I have chosen lesson plans for the middle school vocal and general music class that would meet the National Standards Grades 5-8. By using these standards, some lesson plans will be interdisciplinary with Language Arts, Science, Math, and History. These lesson plans will range from one forty-five minute class period to unit plans of two weeks or more. Knowing that choir is a performance group, the first standard (1. Singing a varied repertoire of music) is easily achieved. I have collected and adapted many other lessons that will incorporate the other eight standards.

Some school systems, including where I teach, may be unique in not offering general music classes at the middle school level. With that in mind, and having choirs “team taught”, I will be implementing “general music”-type lessons into the choral setting. This is achieved by splitting each choir into four groups of equal size, depending on the size of the choir. Each group meets once a week to work on the desired lesson plan. This is a good way to break up the week for the choir students.