



**NYSSMA**  
NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL MUSIC ASSOCIATION

# Advocacy and Media Relations Handbook

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## INTRODUCTION

The future of music education in the state of New York is dependent upon the support of educators, parents, students, communities, legislators and support groups. The New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) provides this *Advocacy and Media Relations Handbook* to aid in supporting music education advocacy efforts at the local level. NYSSMA believes that every student deserves the right to receive a well-rounded education that includes a comprehensive, sequential, high-quality program of music taught by a qualified music educator.

“Public relations involves more than publicizing one event; the latter is promotion. Instead, we must be concerned with an ongoing public relations effort. Our PR work must be continuous, and it must reach further than promotion for a single event.” Neiman and Thoms (1992)

In a statement to school administrators in August, 2009, Arne Duncan, United States Secretary of Education said, “At a time when critical and far-reaching budget and program decisions are being made, I bring to your attention the importance of the arts as a core academic subject and part of a complete education for all students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) defines the arts as a core subject, and the arts play a significant role in children’s development and learning process. The arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem solver who are confident and able to think creatively. These qualities can be especially important in improving learning among students from economically disadvantaged circumstances”

*Without music, life would be an error – Friderich Nietzsche*

## WHAT YOU MUST HAVE TO ADVOCATE FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

An advocate for music education enjoys music, studies music, is informed about music, and supports music education in a variety of ways. Following are some suggestions for becoming an effective advocate for music education:

A Message. Know what you want to accomplish. Make your message clear and direct. Align your message with other music and arts education advocates in your local area, region and within NYSSMA. Develop a plan to accomplish your goals.

Information or Supporting Facts. Know the background information and the impact of your message. Use Advocacy Tips from NYSSMA, MENC, the Support Music Coalition, VH-1 Save the Music, Americans for the Arts to stay informed. Use facts and local success stories to support your message.

Knowledge of Your Audiences. Know who you're targeting and how to tailor your message to each group. Create opportunities by networking and meeting with policy makers (administrators, school board members, elected officials on the local and state levels) to implement your plan.

Persistence Don't give up! Advocacy is an on-going process. There will be setbacks, but the players are always changing. Every day presents new opportunities. NYSSMA can provide data and information to support your local advocacy efforts.

## **MEDIA COVERAGE**

This handbook can assist music programs and community organizations in organizing and implementing local media and public relations. It is designed to help expand the visibility of music in the local school district, and augment the activities being conducted through NYSSMA.

The use of public relations techniques to garner public support of music education and a willingness to take advantage of every opportunity to advance support for music across various target audiences is vital.

In reality, music educators, administrators and community leaders need a working knowledge of who their audiences are and have an effective knowledge and use of public relations and advocacy materials to reach those audiences. Their support will ensure a comprehensive, sequential, high-quality program of music taught by a qualified music educator is available to every student. Remember - *You are the expert.*

## **WHAT IS MEDIA RELATIONS?**

If there is a general weakness in the use of public relations in school music programs, it lies in actual relationships with the media. Because communication between the schools and the media is often viewed negatively – due to the occurrence of problems or conflict – a double-edged sword exists. Kowalski (2000) states that working with reporters has often been viewed as precarious by administrators. They are careful not to give too much information to a reporter for fear of unfair or biased coverage of a story in the effort to build public attention to it, while media officials feel that public school officials often hide information to protect their reputation. He finds, however, a contrast between a new breed of administrators and their relationships with the media. Kowalski (2000) states that administrators “conclude that effective media relations serve to satisfy the public's demands for accurate, complete, and timely information; permit

administrators to introduce ideas for school improvement; and provide a mechanism for building public confidence and support” (p. 273).

Wallace (1990), however, noted that there is a benefit to administrators and teachers when a positive relationship exists between a school district and the media.

1. Administrators establish realistic expectations of the media. 2. Media relations are personalized so that school officials know the reporters who are assigned to cover them. 3. Administrators maintain some control over access to the media and messages that are transmitted. (p. 16)

## **MARKETING THE MUSIC PROGRAM**

Public relations involves more than publicizing one event. We must be concerned with ongoing advocacy efforts. Public Relations and Advocacy must be continuous, and it must reach further than promotion for a single event.

By continuously marketing the music program, one takes a proactive approach to reflect the positive benefits derived by students in a quality music program. By being proactive, music administrators and music educators are able to revel in pride of their programs. As the media report on a district’s music activities, students, parents, administrators, and other members of the school community share in the pride. “As educators, we know that this shared pride can be a critically important factor in determining the extent of our programs’ success” (Neiman & Thoms, 1992, p. 2).

In the uncertain world of school finance and competition for funds and the time and attention of students, the need to build community support must be paramount.

“A proactive, rather than a reactive new report from the school setting is needed to take the lead in communicating effectively in a quality public relations program...[if none exists] there might be tremendous distortions of what a school is doing and what goals are being accomplished” (Ediger, 2001, p. 743).

The development of a communication plan is key to ensuring that what goes on in our classrooms or on our stages are shared with those in positions of authority within a school district. While an extensive background in public relations is not required, a good sense of organization is. Well-planned advocacy can help ensure that the important work of music education continues.

The essence of good public relations depends upon sound, thoughtful, and respectful communication – and this is the key to garnering support for an ensuring survival of music programs: working with a teacher struggling to meet the needs of her diverse student population; encouraging parents to become involved; creating “learning” statements to accompany artwork displays, music programs, or verbal announcements at concerts; quick, efficient customer service to the community – parents, teachers, and business leaders; and, most importantly, sharing a personal belief in and passion for music in the lives of children. (Hansen, pp. 35-36)

## TARGET AUDIENCES

A target audience is defined as a group of individuals with common interests or characteristics to whom you are trying to reach with your specific messages about music education. Target audiences may be classified into primary groups, such as parents, board of education members, district administrators, business owners, community leaders and the media. Your media relations activities should contain a timely mix of information to reach each group.

Parents – We “preach to the choir” when we send our messages to the parents of our student musicians. We must also reach out to local Parent-Teacher Associations as well. Music educators and music administrators should attend meetings, spreading good news and upcoming events to these constituents. Provide a calendar of activities/concerts/stage performances for their use.

Board of Education – Music educators and music administrators should work with District administration to invite members of the board of education to all events and performances sponsored by the Music Department.

District Administrators - Music educators and music administrators should invite their colleagues to all events and performances sponsored by the Music Department. This includes classroom lessons, in-school performances and stage productions.

Business Owners and Community Leaders – Develop and maintain a professional relationship with local business owners, civic leaders, senior citizen centers and public libraries.

Media Outlets– Develop and maintain a professional relationship with members of local media outlets approved by your school district. Check with your Superintendent’s Office or Public Relations Specialist for approval to reach out to these contacts.

## EXECUTION

### Developing Media Lists and Contact Information:

A list of local daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, radio and television shows will be helpful as you “sell” your story. There are a number of ways to obtain contact information including names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of editors and reporters.

NYSSMA keeps a list of media outlets across the state. As this list is constantly being updated, please email [PR@nyssma.org](mailto:PR@nyssma.org) for a summary of media from your area.

Newspapers:

- Assignment Editor (determines what is newsworthy)
- Education Editor (issues pertaining to schools)
- Features Editor (community-oriented events)
- Photo Editor (Photo coverage and selections)

Radio and Television:

Get the name of the news director and the producer of any talk programs that are in your area. Radio talk shows are always looking for interesting guests and topical information- these programs provide excellent opportunities for lengthy interviews for you.

New York State Legislators:

Times of crises should not be the only time you reach out to your government representatives. Members of your local town council, town supervisors, and county legislators should have a basic understanding of your music program and the events it sponsors throughout the year. This is developed over time with invitations to concerts, assemblies, award ceremonies, etc. Your school district office will have information on your local representatives, but you may find out the names and contact information for your local State Senator and Assembly member by visiting the following websites and entering the zip code of your school district:

<http://www.assembly.state.ny.us/>

<http://www.senate.state.ny.us/senatehomepage.nsf/home?openform>

News Tip Idea Sheet:

Use the form on page 11 to help get your thoughts organized. It can act as a checklist as you prepare to disseminate information to the media.

As the expert in your field, you are able to discuss how the following will affect your program:

- Threats to Cuts in Arts Education
- Music & Art Department Events
- All County/All State Students
- Marching Band Championships
- Concerts
- Out-of-State Performances
- Art Exhibits

## WHAT CAN WE DO TO GENERATE POSITIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS?

As music educators, we are in a unique situation that enables us to have students perform.

- If your school district employs a public relations specialist, work closely with that person to promote events happening in your department and to obtain approvals from your District Administrators.
- Write an article about your department. Keep it centered around your curriculum and the successes of your students.
- Use observances like “Music In Our Schools Month”, “Jazz History Month” and “Women’s History Month” to promote how music is related to the curriculum.
- Take advantage of NYSSMA’s “Swiss Cheese” news releases found in the Press Room of the NYSSMA website ([www.nyssma.org/pressroom](http://www.nyssma.org/pressroom)).
- If possible, have your students involved in as many things in your community as possible. These may include:
  - Days for Tuba, Percussion, Horn
  - Tuba Christmas
  - All-Eastern/All-State/All-County Festivals
  - Senior Citizen Centers
  - Town Hall Arts Partnerships

## PROCEDURES FOR GENERATING LOCAL MEDIA COVERAGE

NYSSMA members must take a proactive role in generating favorable public relations about their school music programs and foster good relations with their target audiences and local media outlets. Whenever possible, members should inform their local media (with assistance and guidance from their District’s public relations department) about the positive happenings within their music departments.

As the expert, the music educator and/or the music administrator should work with their District’s Public Relations Department to determine if an event is newsworthy enough to be publicized by a news release or other means (inviting media to a concert, etc.) Sample “Swiss Cheese” news releases and a News Tip Idea sheet follow on pages 9-11.

## HANDLING GENERAL MEDIA INQUIRIES

When the media contacts any NYSSMA member on issues pertaining to their school district’s music program, they should work with their District’s public relations department to formulate an answer. If a NYSSMA member is



contacted by the media for answers to specific questions related to music education in New York State or the country, the State Chairperson of Public Relations and Information should be contacted. If the State Chair does not have neither the answer nor the authority to give an answer, the question is directed to the appropriate NYSSMA Officer. Individual NYSSMA members should not offer any response to a question posed by members of the media that might be misconstrued as the official position of NYSSMA.

Should you ever be put in a situation where you might suspect that NYSSMA could be portrayed in a negative light by your talking to a reporter, SAY NOTHING! There is nothing wrong with telling him or her that you or a NYSSMA representative will get back to them - just make sure you or someone from NYSSMA does! Members of the media know how to manipulate stories by using answers given to interviewing questions to get public reaction. In the unlikely event that the State Chairperson for Public Relations and Information cannot be reached at [PR@nyssma.org](mailto:PR@nyssma.org), please contact your Zone Representative. He or she will work with NYSSMA in answering the question. If these individuals cannot, they can at least filter it to the person or persons who would have the best answer.

#### Message Points

- NYSSMA, the New York State School Music Association, is the largest state affiliate of MENC, the National Association for Music Education, with approximately 6,000 proud members
- The Mission of the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) is to advocate for and improve music education across New York State by promoting and producing appropriate activities and programs for its membership and students in member school music programs
- Each year, over 100,000 students participate in more than 130 adjudication festivals held around New York State
- The NYSSMA Winter Conference attracts almost 4,000 participants and offers about 190 workshops and showcases
- About 6,000 students audition for the 8 All-State performing groups, and just under 900 are selected to participate annually
- The School Music News is mailed to every NYSSMA member throughout the year and keeps everyone fully informed
- The NYSSMA Manual is the definitive resource for setting standards and expectations for each instrument and voice part at every level
- With District approval, add this to your boilerplate statement: (Your School District) serves (xxx students) in (xxx) buildings. Approximately (xxxx) students are active in the music program in grades kindergarten through twelve. (xxxx) students earned a spot in the Top 10 of the Graduating Class of (insert year).

Creating a News Release from Scratch

- Write it as you want to Read it
- Keep it Student-Centered
- Be Precise
- Use Present Tense
- Editors Cut from Bottom Up
- Use Short Quotes to Add Impact
- Double, Triple, Quadruple Check Spelling
- Get Permission from Subject before Quoting
- Send One Month before Event

(Adjust margins for school district letterhead)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Your Name, Title  
Phone Number

**(Name of District) Prepares to host NYSSMA Adjudication Festival**

***Over 130 NYSSMA Solo & Ensemble Festivals Commencing across the State***

Westbury, NY – The (Name of School District) school district is honored to host an adjudication festival sponsored by the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA). As one of over 130 festivals across New York State (name of District) will host a local evaluation festival that gives students an objective means of assessing their musical performance.

“NYSSMA adjudication festivals result in two major outcomes,” said (your name). “They provide information to students, parents, teachers and other interested individuals on the positive aspects of the performance and those in need of improvement. They also identify and recognize high levels of musical achievement in individuals and groups.”

Through the state-wide accessibility of this process, participants receive educational value through written feedback from highly-trained adjudicators. Students and teachers are given results and suggest opportunities for improvement.

“Individuals and small ensembles can participate for a rating and obtain medals acknowledging demonstrated levels of achievement,” Weber said. Major organizations (bands, choruses, orchestras) participating for a rating receive certificates acknowledging their level of achievement. It is through these processes that the highest achieving students are selected for and participate in All-State performing groups.” NYSSMA, the New York State School Music Association, is the largest state affiliate of MENC, the National Association for Music Education.

The Mission of the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) is to advocate for and improve music education across New York State by promoting and producing appropriate activities and programs for its membership and students in member school music programs.

(insert school district boilerplate statement found at your Office of Public Relations or Superintendent).

# # #

## ADJUST MARGINS FOR LETTERHEAD

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

*(Your Name)*  
Band Director  
631-555-1212

***(School Name)* High School Marching Band  
To Perform at Rose Bowl in Hawaii**

***NYS Champion Band will march in televised parade***

*(Anytown, Date)* – Trumpets will wail and drums will roll as the students of the *(name of school)* Marching Band again represent their community to the world by marching in the 2004 Rose Bowl parade in Honolulu, HI. This year's parade – to be televised on *(Date and Time)* – will be viewed by an estimated 3 million people on *(name of Network)*.

“The kids are excited and I’m thrilled for them,” said Band Director *(Your Name)*. “They’ve worked hard to get to Hawaii. We’re going to play our hearts out and have great memories to cherish.”

This invitation is a first for the band. In years past, the NYS Champion Marching Band has won numerous awards including best auxiliary, best percussion and best drum major; and championship titles throughout New York and the East Coast.

(Insert district boilerplate statement found in the Office of PR or Superintendent)

# # #

**News Tip Idea Sheet**

Who is Involved (Students, teachers, administrators, parents, members of Board of Education)?

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Who is the Contact Person? (Include phone number, e-mail and cell phone number for on-site contact)

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What is the Event?

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Where will the Event be Located (School Building, District Office, Community Library)?

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When will the Event take place (During the school day, After School, Weekend)?

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Why are you holding the Event (Is it related to the Curriculum? Are you hosting an out-of-district artist or performer)?

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Have approvals been obtained (Superintendent, Principal, Director)?

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Are you taking photographs and have legal releases been obtained for use of minors in photographs?

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Will supplementary materials be distributed at the Event?

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## Checklist for Local-Level Advocacy

Now is an excellent time to look back at the past year and evaluate what you may or may not have done to help ensure the survival and growth of your school's music program. It's also high time to plan next year's course of action. The following checklist (courtesy of the South Carolina Music Educators Association) should help you in your evaluation and planning. If you find that you have too many checks in the "Once" or "Did Not Do" column, you may want to consider adding those ideas in the coming year. Perhaps they will spark some creative improvisation on your part. Remember, advocacy is the responsibility of all of us!

		More Than Once	Once	Did Not Do
1.	Wrote an article for the school newsletter.			
2.	Called a newspaper photographer, editor, or reporter.			
3.	Wrote and sent out a news release.			
4.	Involved other subject areas in a cooperative project.			
5.	Served on a district - wide committee.			
6.	Wrote a "Letter to the Editor" in support of music education.			
7.	Publicized <i>Music In Our Schools Month</i> activities.			
8.	Informed administrators of my community and state musical activities.			
9.	Discussed music education to a service club or community group.			
10.	Worked with a citizen's support group for music education.			
11.	Made a presentation to the school board.			
12.	Prepared a fact sheet about my music program.			
13.	Surveyed community attitudes.			
14.	Prepared an audio-visual presentation on music education for use if needed.			
15.	Discussed the school music program with community leaders, school board members, etc.			
16.	Presented an In-service on my music program to teachers at a teachers' meeting			
17.	Sent letters with complimentary tickets to board of education members, school administrators and community leaders.			
18.	Wrote letters of thanks to media, community, and political leaders in raise of efforts to advance the arts.			
✓	Take Action! Contact NYSSMA for more ideas!			

## **BOILERPLATE STATEMENT**

NYSSMA, The New York State School Music Association, is the largest state affiliate of MENC: The National Association of Music Education.

The mission of NYSSMA is to advocate for and improve music education across New York State by promoting and producing appropriate activities and programs for its membership and students in member school music programs.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

### **NYSSMA New York State School Music Association**

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NYSSMA Office Phone - 1-888-NYSSMA-1  
Fax - 516-997-1700

NYSSMA President  
[President@nyssma.org](mailto:President@nyssma.org)

NYSSMA State Chairperson for Public Relations and Information  
[PR@nyssma.org](mailto:PR@nyssma.org)

NYSSMA State Chairperson for Advocacy and Government Relations  
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