The State of the Association

Michael J. Salzman – NYSSMA® President

I’ve always loved watching the State of the Union address. From the moment the Sergeant at Arms welcomes the President into a joint session of Congress, I am enthralled by the pageantry of the event. From the spontaneous rounds of applause, to the honored guests seated next to the First Lady, to the stoic looks on the faces of the Supreme Court justices — politics aside, it’s always a majestic event. So, as I approach the end of my NYSSMA® presidency, I thought I would take this opportunity to look back on the past two years and offer you my assessment of the State of our Association.

I’d like to start by saying that the state of the association is strong! (Thunderous applause erupts). I’d like to acknowledge the enormous support I’ve gotten from my wife, Kathi. (More thunder as I point to her in the presidential box.) And, thanks to both Dr. and Mrs. Schopp, who are seated beside her, for their enormous encouragement and guidance over the course of many years. (Standing ovation from both sides of the aisle.)

As I look back on the goals I set for my presidency, I’m very proud of the areas in which we’ve made some great progress, but certainly realize that we still have a way to go in others.

**Increasing access**

I set a priority to increase access to music education by increasing access to NYSSMA®. I focused a lot of my attention on urban districts. I’m proud of the fact that we now have more festivals in and near our urban centers so that students are finding it easier to get to adjudication sites. I’ve reached out to urban educators and hope that they realize that NYSSMA® wants to be their partner in helping more of their students gain access to a high-quality sequential music education.

I’m frustrated that I was not able to do more to help rural districts. I quickly learned that they have a very different set of needs from those of urban students, and for the sake of expediency, I focused on urban centers because I felt that I could affect more students that way. We need to continue to work to meet the needs of ALL of New York’s students, and we need to shine a bigger spotlight on rural schools.

**Focus on diversity**

As I wrote last month, we need to continue to focus on issues of diversity within our profession and our association. We need to help more Hispanic students and students of color to see a place for themselves in our profession. We need to reach more of these students through culturally responsive ensembles. We need to work with our higher education partners to attract those students into their music education programs. Once they come through these programs we need to welcome them into our profession, and we need to encourage them to take on leadership positions in our association.

If young music students of all backgrounds don’t see themselves taking on the positions currently filled by their music teachers, then we don’t stand a chance of increasing the diversity within our profession, and, if we don’t do that, then perhaps we are just not going to ever say we are meeting the needs of ALL of the students we serve.

**Advocacy**

NYSSMA’s advocacy efforts are strong. I recently asked a member of the State Assembly what more we could do to advocate for music education and his response was wonderful. He said, “Just keep doing what you are doing. Every one of us knows who you are and what you stand for. We look forward to your visits every March and to hearing your students perform in our corridors. You have put us in a position where we hear your
voices ringing in our minds whenever we make decisions that could impact music students."

So, if you ever wonder why we have NYSSMA® Joe Sugar Day in Albany, that's why! We need to continue to advocate for our programs, within our schools, our communities, and on the state level. We need to do a better job of engaging parents because their voices are the ones that local decision makers hear the loudest.

Keep an eye out for some important legislation coming out of Albany and Washington. There are bills and proposed bills that could guarantee that every student has access to music education, and that would be absolutely amazing. When you hear about these, contact your legislators, write to them, call their offices or maybe even go visit them. We are on the cusp of some major breakthroughs with both federal and state legislations that could be monumental in our ongoing advocacy efforts.

**Membership**

Goals toward increasing our membership remain a frustration. In discussions with the Executive Council, we've come to the conclusion that the very best way to increase membership is one-on-one. We've all made it a priority to talk about the importance of membership and invite and encourage our colleagues to maintain their NAIEME/NYSSMA memberships.

We need each of you to do the same. Increasing membership makes our profession stronger. It gives us a stronger voice, but also it keeps us united and focused on like goals. With a strong united membership, professional development becomes about developing the profession!

**Coda**

I've had the opportunity to work closely with some remarkably dedicated individuals, and I am so confident that those who will be following me will continue making NYSSMA® stronger and stronger each year. I'd like particularly to thank my fellow officers Michael Brownell, David Brown, Russ Faunce and Robin DeSantis for their support, friendship and their incredible dedication to NYSSMA®.

Congratulations to our new Executive Director, Dr. David Gaines. NYSSMA® looks forward to many great things ahead with your guidance and support. I couldn't possibly thank everyone else with whom it has been an honor to work. Let's just say that I've served alongside so many great people, and I thank them all for their dedication to NYSSMA® and to music education. Serving as NYSSMA® President has surely been the greatest honor of my professional career as an educator. (President exits the capitol, shaking hands, hugging friends, a few selfies, a wave and a smile).