Greetings and Happy New Year!

Derek Schmelter – NYSSMA®-NAfME Collegiate President, Queens College

Just a few short months ago, we gathered for the annual NYSSMA® all-state winter conference. It was great to see so many future music educators enjoying the conference sessions, exhibits, meetings, and concerts. Equally important was experiencing firsthand the many benefits that our NYSSMA® and NAfME memberships provide us.

As your State Collegiate President, I appreciated getting to spend time with you as we contemplated and anticipated our future work in music classrooms across the state! For those who were not able to make it this year, we hope to see you at the 2020 NAfME Collegiate Advocacy Summit in June (www.nafme.org) and at the collegiate sessions that will be a part of the 2020 NYSSMA® Summer Conference in Albany (www.nyssma.org).

Great collegiate turnout

At the 2019 Winter Conference, Collegiate-NYSSMA® hosted six sessions that also included a Student Teaching Panel led by Amanda Petrel-la-Christ; Managing Public Relations with NYSSMA’s Public Relations Chair, Dr. John Gallagher, and an overview of the New York State Music Standards presented by NYSSMA’s Curriculum Chair, Fred Weingarten. Additionally, we held our annual collegiate business meeting on Friday evening, which was attended by more than 320 collegiate students and advisors alike.

This was our largest gathering yet, and we were lucky to have NYSSMA® Executive Council members in attendance, as well as our NAfME Eastern Division President, Keith Hodgson! President Hodgson spoke about the importance of our collegiate membership and the impact the we have on the future of music education. His reminder about the role we can have in the future of music education seemed, at least to me, an important underlying theme of the 2019 NYSSMA® Winter Conference. There was plenty to contemplate about the conference on my seven-hour drive back to CUNY-Queens College.

As your Collegiate-NYSSMA® President, I am also honored to be your voting member of the Executive Council. There is a wealth of wisdom that each Council member holds and along with that wisdom comes a vast array of experiences. As the collegiate member of the Council, I have the responsibility to represent the collegiate members across the state. In other words, I am your voice. Please reach out to me and share your thoughts, ideas, and aspirations for Collegiate-NYSSMA® (dschmeltermusic@gmail.com).

‘Big idea’ conversations

Throughout our winter gathering, I felt that a lot of the “big idea” discussions were indicative of the kinds of conversations that collegiate members are having on their own campuses. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and representation are among the most important topics in education today, and I am confident that the strategies we are learning in our coursework will prepare us for making music inclusive to all learners.

Furthermore, we are all having these conversations before we become in-service teachers, which makes these topics even more prescient as we progress through our degree programs. If we continue to think outside the box about how to include ALL learners in our classrooms, cultivate diverse ensembles and showcase repertoire written by a broad spectrum of composers, we will create a greater and more diverse music community in the future.

I am not afraid of the future of music education because I believe that new teachers see how great our association is and how we can make out mark on the successes of those we look up to.

Promote music education

As we move into the new year, I am excited for the future and the opportunities that await all of us as we all work toward our collective goal: becoming the music educators of tomorrow.

March is Music in Our Schools Month (MIOSM), which is a chance to showcase our music programs and the importance of having music in our lives and the lives of our students. As collegiate members, this is an opportunity to give back to the communities that support our passion for music.

Creating a practice-a-thon is a great way to turn your daily practice routine into donations to local music programs in need. Collegiate chapters reach out to family and friends to “sponsor” their practice time for a few weeks in hopes of donating the proceeds to local music programs. This is just one idea chapters can use to give back, and I know with the creativity of the collegiate members in New York, there are many more ways we can help support music in our schools during the month of March!

The winter conference has always been a great experience for me, and I hope that those of you who attended this year feel the same way. Knowing that there are so many people in New York who care about the future of music education is inspiring. I am excited to be a part of such a great community, and I hope that you are too.

All the best,

Derek Schmelter