



# Back to School, a Bit Differently

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*“To stop the flow of music would be like the stopping of time itself, incredible and inconceivable.” – Aaron Copland*

Hello, my friends and colleagues. This is my back-to-school editorial that I so looked forward to writing when I first became President-Elect. Oh, the things I wanted to share with you before you started another year of teaching one of the greatest disciplines I have ever had the privilege to teach! Sadly, this is not that article. I can only hope for an assemblance of normalcy for September of 2021, but here we are.

Let me start by changing the title from “Back to School” to just “To School.” That is why I put the strikethrough the word “back” in the second sentence. There is nothing normal or regular or traditional in this school year, especially as it relates to music education. I think about history and the many times people needed to change what they knew to what they now comprehend. This is one of those times. But at the foundation of all shifts there is a fundamental belief, and ours is not changing.

Every child **MUST** be afforded a music education! It is the law. As I build my school year, I remind myself about the social and emotional needs of children, the requirements of New York State, and the love our children need. One thing we can't **forget**, however, are the social and emotional needs, love, and requirements for

life of our teachers. You must have so many emotions right now! How will I do this with distancing rules, masking, my own health, meeting the standards, or worse, keeping my program and my job? We know and we understand and we stand with you for anything you need. We are NYSSMA®, we are Music Educators, no - we are *educators*.

*You can teach music;  
it is just going to  
be different*

### **NYSSMA® is here for you**

Some of you are not even going back into your classrooms. Some of you are not going back into your districts. In-person, hybrid, and remote are new to our vernacular for all of us. Who would have ever thought we would be talking like this, let alone teaching like this? Not me for sure. But here we are and I know deep in my soul **WE** are the discipline to attack, embrace, and love as best we can. We build relationships through music and we build lifelong learners through music.

We are strong but we are also human. We have our own fears for

our lives and our family's lives. Some colleagues have lost their jobs or are working in a job different from what they remember last March. Whatever you are feeling and whatever you need, reach out to an advocate in your area. As you will read later in this article and throughout the *School Music NEWS*, we have set up advocacy leaders in every zone (see below). Let's start with the elephant in the room. If you are going back in person, how the hell are you going to teach? Twelve-foot social distancing? Masking? No singing because of aerosol distribution? Does this sound familiar? Is your administrator telling you, “No music?”

You can teach music; it is just going to be different. How many of us started our careers teaching music on a cart? Teaching instrumental music in four buildings? Teaching five or more preps every day? What did we do? We met the challenge head on! We can do it again.

No, you don't have to stop teaching music but you have to do it differently. You may have an administrator who is afraid of singing in the general music classroom. So be it. Teach the standards without singing. How? There are many ways. Check out our website for alternative teaching methods on our “Best Practices” page, which details all the different ways to

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teach music. <http://www.nyssma.org/advocacy/nyssma-covid-19-guidance/nyssma-best-practices-committee/>

### **Not easy, but possible**

Please know that I am not trying to make this sound simple. I am just giving you all the help we can. This situation is not simple. This is one of the hardest things any of us has ever needed to do. None of this article is meant to sound like I have all of the answers, but it is one of my roles to give you everything I can to help. Like I said earlier, this should have been my uplifting back-to-school message but it is fraught with our realities. One thing it is filled with though – love.

What about our ensembles? Even if we did create music with our band, orchestra, choir, modern band, etc., who is going to listen? Can we have a concert? How large would the room have to be and can we even invite an audience? My question to you is do we teach band or chorus as an example or do we teach instruments (including the voice)? We are the most adaptable discipline, remember? So, we teach up to the performance. We teach the standards in smaller groups. We have a curriculum we have to meet. We teach children, not bands and orchestras. Again, we have to think differently if we are going to survive. We teach MUSIC. Here

is some help from an additional ad hoc committee. (See the NYSSMA® website for the Future of Ensembles Ad Hoc Committee.)

Advocacy is our third ad hoc group, and while you might say we already have advocacy, and would be right, this group is advocacy on steroids. We have created a contingency of advocates with representatives all over the state. Each zone has one or more advocates for you to reach out to when you have a problem or, more important, need guidance. It is a HUGE think tank that meets regularly to share and collaborate on solutions.

These ad hoc committees are described in much more detail later in the *School Music NEWS* and on our website, so check them out. Each group is made up of leaders in our organization, as well as members at large. It was important to me to have the voice of the people/membership. One of my dreams as your president is to get more people involved. You are invited to the table, ladies and gentlemen. And, thank you to the officers in charge, the co-chairs, and the committee members for the countless hours to help you, the educators in the field.

### **Tap into your passion**

My final thoughts are, I hope, uplifting. I have to try. We are the

music makers. I have had many of my past students (starting year 32) reach out to me and ask, “How am I going to do this?,” and I say you do it with love, passion, drive, and knowledge. When we all became music teachers, I hope we did it because someone changed our lives and we wanted to give that back to thousands more children. Or because we HAD to have music as our profession. Music connected us and we connect music for thousands more. I know that is why I did it. I never thought, “I will teach if I can’t perform.” I always said, “I will perform if I can’t teach or when I don’t teach.” This is and was my passion.

We are here for one reason, I hope: the children and the music. We start this year and come back for their faces, for their social and emotional needs, for their love of music. People have also asked me how will I know how the children are feeling behind those masks and I say, “Look deep into their eyes.” Our eyes are the connection to our souls. You will see the joy in their faces.

We are the music makers and they are the music receivers. Go with love and go with the understanding you are making a difference in children’s lives when they need music more than ever and they need you more than ever. ||