# Advocacy in the Time of COVID: What You Must Know!

**Lori Orestano-James** – NYSSMA® State Advocacy Chair and Ad-Hoc Co-Chair, **Michael Mastrangelo** – NYSSMA® Advocacy Ad-Hoc Co-Chairperson, **Russ Faunce** – NYSSMA® President-Elect

While advocacy is an integral part of being a music educator, it is of paramount importance in these pandemic times. With public health policy, economic conditions and educational procedures changing quickly and constantly, establishing an advocacy game plan is quite challenging. We must continually advocate for music education programs with a spirit of flexibility and creativity on behalf of our students.

To date, the NYSSMA® Advocacy Ad-Hoc Committee has established the following:

- A network of Zone Advocacy Representatives to answer and assist with issues at a more localized level.

- A survey process to learn the current needs of music teachers across New York State. A summary of our first survey, dated July 9, 2020, can be found below, and a survey to collect updated information will be forthcoming to our NYSSMA® members.

- Readiness to respond to developing conditions, including election results and their impact on potential economic stimulus initiatives.

- A collection of meaningful professional development opportunities, website links and information to support teacher advocacy efforts, found at: http://www.nyssma.org/advocacy/nyssma-covid-19-toolkit/

- A Cyber Summit featured session on Thursday, December 3, including a 30-minute presentation from 8:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on breaking initiatives and an open question-and-answer-session immediately following that beginning at 8:30 pm. Register for NYSSMA's Cyber Summit at www.nyssma.org.

Our planning recommendations for music program advocacy at the school district level includes:

- Make your work this year count! Find every opportunity to provide your students with a musical experience that makes them LOVE music. The students and their parents are among the most effective advocates in our toolbox.

- Look now at your budgetary needs for the 2021-2022 school year given the currently proposed 20% across-the-board cut in state aid for education. School districts usually begin their budget process in October or November.

- Strategize priorities within your program and funding with an eye on flexibility. We are not sure how deep budget cuts may be, so you will need to be prepared to both cut and add back items.

- Know the rationales for your decisions and priorities and be able to articulate them clearly.

- Be proactive in the advocacy process by providing solutions and alternatives in lieu of demands.

- Educate your administrators in terms of your program and your strategies for maintaining and ultimately rebuilding future capacity in a realistic, forthcoming manner.

The Advocacy Ad-Hoc Committee is ready and willing to assist you in any way that we can and looks forward to seeing you at the upcoming Cyber Summit. Until then, take a moment to remember what made you love music and share that with your students in any way that you can.

While current learning and teaching conditions may not be ideal, remember to look toward the future by sharing your passion for music. Students, parents, colleagues, administrators and community members will wholeheartedly advocate for programs when they understand the social-emotional aspect of what music brought to them during this dark period. Stay safe, stay healthy and always keep a song in your heart!

# Advocacy in the Time of COVID: What You Must Know! *continued*

## NYSSMA® COVID-19 Survey Summary – July 9, 2020

In late June 2020, the NYSSMA® Ad-Hoc Advocacy Committee conducted a COVID-19 pandemic-related survey of its membership. Approximately 650 music educators responded to the survey by July 9, 2020.

Although there were many unknowns about district reopening plans at that time, NYSSMA® received valuable information to reflect upon as an organization. We heard members voice their frustrations as they were met with the most challenging teaching experiences of their careers. At the same time, it was encouraging to read about the success teachers achieved as they adapted to their new surroundings.

By sharing this information with our membership, it is our hope that it may also be of use at a local level. As an example, the technology-related questions may be used to inform local professional development. A summary of the results is listed below. (Bullets are listed in priority order.)

**Has your school district formed a reopening committee?**
- 75% of the responses reported "yes."

**Is a music educator a member of the reopening committee?**
- 46% of the responses reported "yes."

**Are you aware of any projected reductions in MUSIC PROGRAM for your district for the 20-21 school year?**
- 16% of the responses reported "yes."

**Are you aware of any projected reductions in MUSIC STAFF for your district for the 20-21 school year?**
- 18% of the responses reported "yes."

**If so, what are the projected reductions to program and/or staffing?**
- Approximately 35% of the responses regarding reduction of staff indicated that openings due to retirement were not being filled.
- Approximately 14% of the responses indicated that a reduction in music was clear at the time of the survey.
- Approximately 13% of the responses regarding the reduction of staff indicated that part-time teaching positions were removed.
- Nine school districts indicated reductions in excess of one teaching position.
- The majority of program reductions appear to be occurring at the elementary level.
- In some instances, music educators indicated that only supply budgets had been reduced.
- Many responses indicated that actual reductions to program and staffing are not clear at this time.

**What do you foresee as being the hardest thing that you will have to convince administration about in the coming school year?**
- Allowing music program to exist as it has in the past.
- Safety of students and staff.
- Funding for teaching positions, new equipment, repairs and new online technology needed for remote learning.
- Having access to music facilities (classrooms and large spaces for ensemble rehearsals).

**Understanding that advocacy is a necessary function for all music teachers, what areas of advocating for your program do you need the most guidance/instruction in?**
- The ability to communicate how a quality music program can be maintained, regardless of the model (in-person, hybrid, fully remote), for all students that is safe, meaningful and standards-based.
- How music programs can be administered safely.
- How to advocate and communicate instructional needs (training for virtual learning, curriculum revisions, assessment and grading, access to music instruments, cleaning and repair of instruments, staffing).
- How to access research and data to support music program.
- How to advocate for facilities that support music program.
- How to recruit and retain students.
- How to advocate during budget planning process.
- How to advocate for scheduling that is conducive to music performance.
- How to advocate that social and emotional learning is an integral component of music education.

**What online learning platform(s)/tools did you utilize during the 2019-2020 school year?**
- Google Classroom
- Flipgrid
- SmartMusic
- Zoom
- Google Meet
- Google Suite
- YouTube
- Sight Reading Factory
- Microsoft Teams
- Schoology
- Screencastify
- Soundtrap
- Quaver

- EdPuzzle
- Seesaw
- Musictheory.net
- Essential Elements interactive
- Noteflight
- iMovie
- MusicFirst
- Remind
- Acapella
- Microsoft Suite
- Class Dojo
- Breezin' Thru Theory
- GarageBand
- Chrome Music Lab
- ToneSavvy
- Canvas

**What are some of the successes you've experienced during remote teaching and learning?**
- Increased individualization of instruction (ability to teach lessons or meet with students in a 1:1 ratio).
- Increased ability for teachers to connect with and learn more about students and their families (emphasis on social and emotional learning).
- Increased participation by students who tend to be less comfortable in a traditional classroom social setting.
- Lessons designed to include family participation.
- Teachers becoming proficient with music and general instruction-related computer technology. Teachers commented how they would continue to use new technology learning in a traditional educational setting.
- Teachers commented that live virtual instruction (Google Meet, Zoom) worked well under the circumstances.
- Multitrack audio and video recordings were used in place of traditional concert performances. Teachers also used live remote meetings (Google Meet, Zoom) and recorded solo videos as a substitute for performances.
- Increased focus on non-performance music activities (listening and responding, music theory, music composition, music history).
- Motivated students had increased time to participate in music activities due to quarantine.
- Teachers reported that they worked more closely with departmental colleagues during remote instruction (instructional planning and sharing ideas).
- Teachers found the software program Flipgrid to be useful for assessing and providing feedback to submitted student recordings.

**What are some of the obstacles you've experienced during remote teaching and learning? (reorder)**
- Students were less motivated to participate (lack of student engagement, participation, attendance, or submitting of assignments).
- Teachers found the remote environment very limiting for performing music. To Making Music: Referred to the general struggles with making music, internet lag prohibiting live rehearsal, instrumental or vocal lesson difficulty.
- Teachers encountered complications with the access and implementation of new software.
- There were students who did not have the necessary technology or internet access to participate.
- Teachers felt a lack of support from administrators and parents regarding student participation and accountability (attendance/grading/scheduling).
- Teachers indicated that there was a lack of direct access to students and it was difficult to keep up with phone contacts and e-mails.
- Teachers reported less social interaction with students.
- Teachers indicated that there were students who did not have access to musical instruments at home. In addition, teachers were unable to assist with any instrument issues (tuning strings).
- Teachers indicated that their workload Increased (challenges maintaining work/life balance).
- Teachers found it extremely challenging to plan and prepare remote lesson content (remote challenges, shifting expectations, student access to learning materials/instruments).
- Teachers indicated an increased challenge in meeting the needs of the English language learners population (language barriers, internet access).
- Teachers indicated that they were not prepared to transition to remote learning.
- Teachers indicated that there was not enough professional development available from their school district.
- Teachers indicated that the scheduling of classes became a challenge due to other district program adjustments.

**Are you prepared to instruct your music program if remote learning continues during the 20-21 school year?**
- 75% of the responses reported "yes."

**What online learning platform(s)/tools are you interested in learning more about?**
- Smart Music
- Flipgrid
- Virtual Ensembles
- Google Classroom
- Video Editing (Adobe Premiere)
- MusicFirst
- Soundtrap
- Video conferencing apps (Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom)
- Noteflight
- Quaver
- Sight Reading Factory
- Nearpod
- My Choral Coach
- EdPuzzle
- Peardeck
- Padlet
- Useful free software