



NYSSMA®

A State Unit of NAfME, National Association for Music Education

January 27, 2021

Dear Governor Cuomo,

I am increasingly concerned that music programs throughout our state are being decimated by the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on our school systems and would like to request a meeting to discuss what can be done to revitalize this essential aspect of our schools, while still ensuring the health and wellness of students and teachers. I write to you as both the President of the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) and Superintendent of the DeRuyter Central School District. This is one of several letters and emails that I have sent to you, the Board of Regents, and the State Education Department, that have gone unanswered, and I would like to implore you to give this matter your attention.

Last August, as schools were preparing their reopening plans, it was recommended to have twelve feet of separation between students that would be singing, playing wind instruments, and in physical education classes compared to all other curricular classes. I am not a public health expert, my areas of expertise are in music education and school leadership, and I can tell you that many schools found it impossible to adhere to that recommendation and therefore eliminated or significantly curtailed their chorus and band programs. Besides the many musical impediments to students trying to work collaboratively as an ensemble, at that distance, many schools do not have the space to accommodate having students that far apart and have forgone music for the year. Part of my dissertation looked at the percentage of students that never return to music once they drop out of a music program, and I fear that many will not return to programs that were suspended due to the pandemic. We must find a way to keep the music alive for our students!

(continued)

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Last Friday you opened up the possibility of having high risk athletics start as early as February 1st. This has led to many music educators questioning why our students can participate in sports, such as basketball and wrestling, yet they still cannot participate in the act of making music while being less than twelve feet from each other. I am a person, like you, that follows the science and have read several aerosol studies that have shown important data in regard to singing and playing wind instruments. Please know that I would never ask us to do anything that would put anyone's health in jeopardy. My request is for you to assemble a committee of health experts and music educators, including myself, that would review the data from several international studies on this topic and consider the validity of the twelve-foot recommendation, and to ascertain the ramifications of allowing music students to maintain the same six feet of social distancing that we see in all other aspects of our curricular classes. If it were found to be relatively safe to do so, there is a chance that schools would see a much needed resurgence in curricular music programs. As some of the many benefits to a comprehensive music education relate to the social and emotional needs of our students, I believe this to be an urgent request at a critical time.

I believe that you and I owe it to the students of New York to undertake a thorough review of the research and scientific data. All I am asking is that we sit down together, along with medical experts, review the aerosol studies, and make decisions based on science. In your State of the State Address you talked about the importance of an Arts Education as it relates to the social and emotional well-being of children, and I have long known you to be a staunch supporter of Arts Education. With that in mind, and as we are just over one month shy of Music in Our Schools Month, I ask you to please consider my request for a meeting and a thorough review of the standing recommendations regarding music in our schools.

Sincerely,



Dr. David M. Brown

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cc. Commissioner of Education
New York State Health Department

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