

Dr. David M. Brown – NYSSMA® President



## Music Is Eternal

**H**appy New Year! This is my 33rd year in public education and each and every year brings a new sense of hope and possibilities. I thought about what I would say as we ended the last school year. I had a much more normal graduation. Masks were optional. Distancing was reduced. And, sadly, we are opening our schools with more unknowns, worries, frustrations, and fear. So how do we start with optimism and possibilities in this crazy reality? We do it like we always have - better than everyone else. I do sometimes feel like I am repeating myself a lot but this needs repeating if you ask me. I have five New Year's Resolutions for you to consider.

**1. We are change experts.** No one knows how to manage change like a music educator. As I look back at 33 years, I remember countless hurdles that I had to face in the music classroom, as an Arts Leader, and as your President. We are the *Wisest One in the Room* and need to educate the people around us. We know how to advocate better than any other discipline.

If and when you can't advocate on your own, I have created a team of advocates. Our Advocacy Chair has placed a person in each of the areas/zones of New York State. Check out the NYSSMA® website to find your advocacy person. As I have said a million times, you can also reach out to me and I will connect you with the wisest person in my room. I am very quick to admit if I don't know the answer but I do know a lot of people and will get you who you need.

**2. Find your WHY.** These have been unparalleled times, and we still have difficult times ahead. Why did you become a music educator? I remember someone once heard me sing and asked why I didn't pursue that professionally. My answer was quick, "Because I did pursue my professional dream – to teach."

*Music is the longest standing mode of communication ...*

My WHY is to make a difference in children's lives, just as many of my teachers did for me. What is your Why? When times get tough, remind yourself why you chose the path you did. Why does teaching music empower you each and every day you help children find their passions? If you are unsure of your why, look deep inside yourself and find it again.

A normal year for a music teacher is enough to question our why, but add this crazy pandemic world and it is too easy to lose sight of it. Reach out to others, talk to your colleagues about their Why, talk to a spouse, or maybe talk to your students. It will all come flooding back. It does for me

every day. I just became old enough to retire last year. I am still here because I have not fulfilled *my* Why in its fullness yet. I reach deep down every time I question myself and remind myself why I am here.

**3. Tap into your Grit.** Boy, is this easy for us, isn't it? We have more grit than anyone I know. We work 24/7. Many of us leave our "day job" and then teach privately or gig. Many of us juggle work, family, profession and do it better than anyone. Grit by definition says we set goals and follow through. Yup, that is us. We know how to program, schedule, manage many more students at one time than any other discipline, create memories of a lifetime for children, and on and on. We do it well, and we do it and follow through, don't we? We have Grit. It is also defined as having passion and perseverance.

Enough said! Passion? You better have passion if you are in this profession because it is one of the things that gets us through those tough times. I am so impressed each and every day when I see the Grit in music educators and music leaders.

**4. Talent vs. Effort.** This has been a longtime wonder of mine and integral to my leadership in and out of the classroom. I truly believe that effort can supersede talent any day. I have watched effort win the day over what is perceived as natural talent so many times!

That being said, it is the guidance you give the effort. Talent or effort is useless or stale without the teaching you give each and every

day. This also falls into your own professional world. The effort you have put forth to work and learn through this pandemic has been fraught with new details, ideas, and in many ways, new ways of teaching. You did it and will continue to do it. You are probably a very talented teacher who has grown out of years of effort, learning, growth, and self-realization. You have the tools and will continue to grow in this profession. Your children deserve it, and you know what? You deserve it!

**5. Continue to Love.** I encourage you to go back and read the article about Leading with Love (Joel Manby, 2012).

- Patience – Be able to have a moment of breathing when confronted with difficult situations. Or, waiting for this time to pass us by to get back to some normalcy. Patience with students coming back to music education this year who have lost so much in technique and maybe passion.
- Kindness – Remember to send kindness to others and you will be amazed at the kindness that will come back to you. We all make mistakes. We all lose our patience. We all can be kind even in the roughest times.
- Trust – Trust your leaders. They do not understand and frequently forget (or truly don't know) that music is a curricular component of the Well-Rounded Education afforded to every child because of the Every Student Succeeds Act. You need to trust your leaders but you also need

to educate them. (I know. I am a broken record.)

- Unselfishness – Boy is this hard right now. Thinking of ourselves less during these stressful times is near impossible. I need to remind myself of this all of the time. Lean on others and allow them to lean on you. It is cathartic, I promise.
- Truth – Be honest with your co-workers, your students, your spouse, your children. You need to let others know how you are feeling. They will appreciate that honesty and, nine times out of ten, will give you the space you need.
- Forgiveness – This has been a long 18 months. We are at a crossroads in the world. I have never felt such division (not speaking about music at all right now). We need to forgive each other for our views. Why is my view better than yours? It is not. We need to listen before we speak, and we need to look deep within ourselves and forgive. Love is the answer in all things we do, and teaching music is love.

These are just some of the tools to get us started again. A jumpstart to a new year and a new world. I hope music will be thriving in your classrooms again. I hope there is joy in a children's faces when they get back to some normalcy. It still won't look like pre-pandemic times, but it should resemble that much more than last year.

We are here to serve, advocate and love. Together there is nothing we can't do in music education. The title of this article and this year's winter conference is Music is Eternal. Music is the longest standing mode of communication of all time. Music has changed over time but it still exists. You can't say that about every aspect of the history of humans, can you? You can about music.

This has been an altering year in regard to music education, but we are coming back and will continue to build back the programs that were left behind last year and maybe create new ones we never knew existed. Music is Eternal! We are a force to be reckoned with and we come together as part of the finest curriculum ever created. We are music educators. We are eternal. Have a great year! ||

*"Music Education opens doors that help children pass from school to the world around them – a world of work, culture, intellectual activity, and human involvement. The future of our nation depends on providing our children with a complete education that involves music."*

– President Gerald R. Ford – 38th U.S. President, 1974-1977