***The 49th Annual Joseph R. Sugar NYSSMA Day in Albany***

**Asks, talking point information and Zoom info for your virtual meetings with legislators on Monday, March 7, 2022**

Dear NYSSMA Colleagues,

As your Government Relations Chairman, I am as disappointed as you that Covid has once again forced us into a Virtual Day in Albany. The instructions for how to set up virtual Zoom meetings have been posted on the GRC/Advocacy webpage since the decision to go virtual was made (https://www.nyssma.org/advocacy/). Hopefully you have made all your appointments with your legislators at this time. If you used a NYSSMA Zoom Account last year your account numbers should be the same for this year. If you don’t have an account number, need a number to set up an account, or are having trouble setting up meetings with your legislators please email me and I will communicate with the Executive Director, Dr. David Gaines at the NYSSMA office, and he will assign you access to a new account to send Zoom invitations to your legislators.

The key to our Day in Albany is relations. The opportunity to create relationships with your legislators is probably the most important part of our Day. When an important group like ours makes the effort to come to Albany in person to talk about music education in a politically savvy fashion our legislators definitely take notice! That is probably the worst aspect of what the Covid pandemic has done to our day for the past 2 years. Just keep in mind that the ability to contact you legislator and have them know who you are and welcome your contacting them is a vital part of what we want to accomplish.

Asks:

1. We want to tell the legislators that the Performing Arts - Band, Chorus and Orchestra, were by far the subjects hardest hit by the pandemic. Here is the opportunity to talk human to human about what you had to personally do to keep your programs alive. Explain how far behind our students are since they have missed so much instruction and performance experience in the past 2 years. Talk about how our 6th graders are performing closer to a beginner level than the level that which would be normal for a student with 3 years of playing experience. Explain about the disruption of the feeder system that keeps our performance programs growing. These are just suggestions. You should feel free to really let the legislators know your own personal experience as a music educator during the Pandemic. Again, it’s part of building a personal relationship.
2. Covid Relief Bill funds for education. Every district in New York should have received funds specifically allocated to music education. Many districts were able to upgrade their program’s hardware – new instruments, computers and especially lots of new music so that students would not have to play from a library that would have worked before the pandemic but now needed new compositions to match the lesser performance abilities of covid era students in all performance disciplines. However, many districts simply discontinued performance groups, using general music classes to meet state curriculum mandates. Then they used the covid relief funds to hire extra general music staff to fit that format. Now, those funds are gone, extra staff let go, and what is left for the improved equipment and new music so desperately needed to help post pandemic music programs? This ask, again, is about relationships. Ask if the legislator knew how much and to where these funds went in the school districts they represent in their district? Find out if there are funds that are still left to be distributed. Talk about what your program really needs right now to catch up.
3. Foundation Aid Funds: Foundation Aid was created in 2007, and takes school district wealth and student need into account to create an equitable distribution of state funding to schools. However, New York State has never fully funded Foundation Aid. In 2014, New Yorkers for Students' Educational Rights filed a suit against New York State. On October 14, 2021, Governor Kathy Hochul announced that New York State had reached an agreement to settle and discontinue the New Yorkers for Students' Educational Rights v. New York State case, following through on the State's commitment to fully fund the current Foundation Aid formula to New York's school districts over three years and ending the State's prior opposition to providing this much-needed funding to our students. While the funds will now be fully and fairly distributed using a plan negotiated with the New Yorkers for Students' Educational Rights as part of the settlement, the problem we face is this: before we see our legislators again in 2023, the Foundation Aid bill will expire. We must urge our legislators to renew the Foundation Aid bill, making its formula even more robust than when the bill was originally created. All schools need this funding, especially rural and city schools.
4. The State Ed Curriculum Associate Conundrum: Over 14 years ago there was an Arts Curriculum department at NYSED with a staff of 6. There was a Director, Assistant Director and 4 curriculum associates responsible for Music, Art, Dance and Theater. When a depression caused State Budget funding problems, these positions were eliminated, leaving one, the Director, responsible for dealing with and answering all questions concerning the arts.

For years, we have asked to have these positions reinstated. After all, how can it be that anyone from a taxpayer to an administrator would have no one with specific expertise to call and ask a question about arts curriculum? NYSED maintained that the jobs no longer had a budget line in the Governor’s budget plan. The Governors officer maintained that it DID have the budget line in place and that it was NYSED that was not requesting the funds! For years we had this issue as one of our primary asks. Now, the ball has been tossed back to the Governors office, with NYSED saying that they have the jobs as a line in their budget but the lines have been eliminated from the Governor’s budget. We must bring this problem to our legislators and ask them to look into finding out what is really holding up the re-creation of the Arts Curriculum Committee. We must ask them to explain what they have found out about the issue. We have to express our frustration and put on some pressure to try to finally solve the problem and move forward.

1. Senate Bill S4525 / Assembly Bill A1788

We have created and worked for support on these 2 bills. They seek to move Music Education from Regulatory to a Statutory status. These are called “same as” bills because their language is identical. They read that these bills: Adds arts and music education as a common school branch that should be incorporated into the public-school curriculum to provide a more well-rounded education for children.

No longer would the arts be a regulation, at the whim of school boards looking to cut program, but would be a Statute passed by both the Senate and the Assembly protecting the arts and music as as a subject protected by both houses

Ask 1 addendum

President Russ Faunce has been researching the NFHS (National Federation of State High School Association) Aerosol study and wants us to know that the aerosol study has gained the support of the CDC. The mitigations we have taken, ie masks, distancing, hygiene, air filtration and general aeration by simply opening windows is starting to prove effective for the resuming of live performance. Russ says: “There’s science out there that has shown (risk-analysis) that our mitigations work.  Leaders and decision makers should be pointed toward the science.”

Here are the links supplied to us by President Faunce to the study and a survey that the NFHS asks teachers to fill out in complete anonymity.

The International Coalition Performing Arts Aerosol Study (of which NAfME is a member) has released updated guidelines for safe, in-person music making. This guidance updates previous mitigation tactics with the continued understanding that state and local COVID-19 guidance and transmission rates must also be consulted.

Please see the two links below from the National Federation of State HS Associations (NFHS) regarding the updated February 2022 Performing Arts Aerosol Study.

Link #1 are the updated guidelines (2nd bullet) - [https://www.nfhs.org/articles/unprecedented-international-coalition-led-by-performing-arts-organizations-to-commission-covid-19-study/](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nfhs.org%2Farticles%2Funprecedented-international-coalition-led-by-performing-arts-organizations-to-commission-covid-19-study%2F&data=04%7C01%7Cgrc%40nyssma.org%7Cc0a4b8b8c1654f80e68b08d9f1b26aca%7C10fec88f8c6b4f8cb9c52356e1981f3d%7C0%7C0%7C637806570897456934%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=%2FLyb0mcbN7NTsJi4hMiCFiKANcns1RZSSSyvH4gw4NQ%3D&reserved=0)

Link #2 is a survey to send out to our membership - [https://www.nfhs.org/articles/music-program-covid-check-in-2/](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nfhs.org%2Farticles%2Fmusic-program-covid-check-in-2%2F&data=04%7C01%7Cgrc%40nyssma.org%7Cc0a4b8b8c1654f80e68b08d9f1b26aca%7C10fec88f8c6b4f8cb9c52356e1981f3d%7C0%7C0%7C637806570897456934%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=i9sdNq1Up7S2YLGN%2FRMBzkeOf3DQRY7g2BfhWZA7q6A%3D&reserved=0)

Questions about the License Plate bill – while this bill still has a number, I have been told that there is virtually no chance of it passing and it’s for a simple reason: the Legislators feel that if they open the door to custom license plates for groups like NYSSMA they would be inundated by so many groups requesting the same thing that they would virtually never get to the pressing bills on the floor. It would be a good question to ask, but we have stronger asks.

As I sign off, I ask you to please remember that while I have written a lot of ideas about how to deal with the presentation to your legislators, please feel free to also bring up matters that are specific to you and your counties. What I have written about is what I think presents strong asks but rest assured, I would never disagree with members bringing up other asks that they feel pertain specifically to situations in their areas. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or issues you’d like to discuss.

Wishing you all a restful Winter Break,

Alan Orloff

NYSSMA GRC Chairman

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