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## PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Edmund Chiarello – NYSSMA® President



# IS MUSIC EDUCATION REALLY IMPORTANT?

*Sharing key answers to a fundamental query*

**I**s music education really important? You bet it is! Music is synonymous with human culture, and its importance in education simply cannot be overstated.

Throughout my career I have often found myself defining — and sometimes defending — the role of a music teacher to people who may not see the full picture. These conversations have happened with administrators (shame on them), parents, friends, community members, and, most often, with fellow teachers from other disciplines (double shame on them).

On a personal level, my energy is primarily rooted in staying grounded and functional as a musician. But a very close second is my drive to share the joy and enrichment music has brought to my life with students. When people ask why music education matters, I have learned that the most effective responses are the ones that keep it simple and real, the answers with which people can easily connect. If you have not been asked the question yet, trust me, it's coming. And when it does, consider this:

Music has been woven into the fabric of human culture for centuries. It is not just an art form: it is a mode of expression, a reflection of history, and a universal language. That is why music education is more than just a class — it is a vital part of a well-rounded education. Study after study confirms what music educators have always known: music enhances learning.

### **The benefits of music**

Participation in music strengthens cognitive skills like memory, language, and spatial-temporal reasoning. It engages both hemispheres of the brain, forging powerful neural connections that support academic growth. As a result, music students often perform better in core subjects like math, science, and reading. They consistently score higher on standardized tests than their peers. Learning an instrument or

singing in an ensemble develops discipline, focus, and perseverance — skills that transfer to every area of learning.

Music also nurtures creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. It challenges students to interpret, create, and communicate ideas in unique and personal ways.

And beyond academics, music fosters vital social and emotional skills. In ensemble settings, students learn teamwork, communication, and collaboration. They work toward a shared goal and support one another along the way. Music builds confidence, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence.

For students who may feel marginalized or isolated, music can be a lifeline, a safe haven for expression and connection. A study published in the *Journal of Research in Music Education* found that students involved in music reported feeling more connected to their schools and peers.

Music builds community. And that sense of belonging can change lives.

### **Music opens up the world**

Music education is not just about notes and rhythms; it is about people. It mirrors our world, our histories, and our differences. Teaching folk songs, traditional dances, and world music preserves cultural heritage while introducing students to new perspectives. Whether familiar or foreign, music becomes a bridge. It teaches acceptance, tolerance, and appreciation for human diversity. Through music, we pass on values of equity, inclusion, and representation.

Let us not forget: music education also prepares students for careers in the arts. Whether it is performance, education, therapy, composition, or sound engineering, school music programs open doors. And even for students who do not pursue music professionally, the skills, experiences, and joy they gain from music will stay with them for life.

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Music education is not an “extra,” and it’s certainly not a luxury. It is an essential part of every student’s academic and personal development. It shapes well-rounded individuals and prepares them for a world that needs creativity, empathy, and collaboration.

As music educators and policymakers, we must ensure that all students have access to high-quality, sequential music instruction taught by certified professionals. Music matters — for their minds, their hearts, and their futures.

### **On a Final Note...**

The past two years have been incredibly full — and, most of the time, incredibly rewarding. Much (not all) of what I set out to accomplish has come to fruition. But let us be clear: meaningful change does not happen because of one person. It takes a team!

I want to recognize a few people who — over and above — assisted me greatly during these past two years:

The All-State Chairs, our Head Chaperones Karen and Neil Bryson, Valerie Massimo and Dr. Bert Nelson, Lindsey Williams, Andy Kittleson, Terry Nigrelli, Brian Wagner-Yeung, Chuck Heck, George Smith, Kerry Mero, Dr. Keith Koster, Susan Weber, Taylor Kelly, and Sophie Wood.

With their help, we:

- Restored All-State to eight ensembles.
- Launched the Majors Clinic program.
- Introduced the NYSSMA® Modern Band Showcase.
- Improved communication through monthly Constant Contact releases and other media.
- Produced the first-ever NYSSMA® online manual.
- Created the NYSSMA® Business Facebook page.
- Redesigned the NYSSMA® website.
- Established the NYSSMA® Academy.

- Increased our focus on the collegiate community — the future of music education.
- Began updating our Constitution and Bylaws.

Thank you to the officers who so completely embraced their roles, allowing me to focus on these initiatives:

- Daryle Redmond, 2nd VP – for all things student performance-related.
- Shelly Bauer, 3rd VP – for expanding our smaller conference and PD offerings.
- Russ Faunce, Past President – for guiding the County Presidents and general membership and providing eye-opening counsel.
- Kathy Perconti, President-Elect – for building the winter conference.

We also weathered our share of challenges, including transitions with three Executive Directors and welcoming a new *School Music News* Editor.

I remain steadfast in my belief that the work we do at NYSSMA® is important, meaningful, impactful, and critical, and it is deserving of our collective support. Thank you for the privilege to serve. Just know, the work is never done. I leave you with two phrases close to my heart:

From Leonard Bernstein:

*“To be the best teachers possible, we need to be the best musicians we can be — not teachers who happen to be teaching music, but musicians who specialize in the art of teaching.”*

And words I share with every collegiate class I teach:

*“We teach children, and if we do that well, we get to teach them music too.”*

I wish President-Elect Kathy Perconti all the best as she leads NYSSMA® into its next chapter. ||