
PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Kathy Perconti – NYSSMA® President



MUSIC FOR LIFE

A new president reflects on music education in stages and the value in changes

It is with great honor and enthusiasm that I introduce myself as I assume the role of President of the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA®). With my background in music education spanning over three decades and a passion for fostering musical excellence, I am excited to lead this esteemed organization into a future filled with innovation, inclusivity, and growth.

A journey rooted in music education

My journey in music began in Vestal, NY, at Willow Point Elementary School. There, I grew as a young musician thanks to my music teachers — Mrs. Hook (classroom/chorus), Mr. Zizzi (orchestra) and Mr. Poet (band). Mrs. Hook let me perform in seven numbers in the variety show and gave me my first conducting experience with the Carpenters's *Top of the World*. Pursuing music outside of the school day, I studied private piano with Mrs. Oliver on Old Vestal Road every Saturday at 8:30 a.m.

At African Road Junior High, I was encouraged to arrange *The Night Chicago Died*. We never performed it, but I'm glad Mrs. Rockwell gave me a chance to put it together. Mr. Grahame introduced us to the world of opera; he was a baritone at Tri-Cities Opera and had the side gig of junior high music teacher. Mrs. Knapp taught us music theory in ninth grade. And the band director, Mr. Wellington, convinced me to play oboe and join the competitive color guard.

In high school in my freshman year, I was lucky enough to audition for and make the renowned ensemble Vestal Voices. I learned so much from Mr. Attridge during my time in that group. He's the reason I auditioned for The Crane School of Music. I ultimately earned my Bachelor of Arts there, followed by a Master of Arts from the University of Buffalo.

As that might detail, I wasn't sure about teaching music in those days. In college I also took theatre and dance classes every semester. I was so obsessed with combining the performing arts that I became a director/choreographer.

Over my years in the profession, I have dedicated myself to nurturing young talents in various educational settings. While having babies, I kept my hands in my career by teaching piano and voice at home. The creative juices began to flow as I raised my children, so I began composing and recording children's songs. This led to teaching *Mommy & Me®* and *Movin' to the Music®* baby and preschool classes. My time at St. John's Humbolt (Diocese of Rochester) saw me teaching classroom music to students from pre-K through sixth grade, plus chorus. And at Fairport Central Schools I further diversified my teaching by focusing on middle school general music and chorus.

Since 2007 I have served as the Choral and Theatre Director at Wayne Central High School. My responsibilities there have included leading select and concert chorus(es), teaching music history, running the musical theatre program and directing a myriad

of extracurricular musical activities. I have also had the experience of teaching college students, acting as a cooperating teacher for more than 20 student teachers over the course of my career. Teaching every grade level has allowed me to impact students at different levels of their music education, thus the theme I have chosen for my presidency: Music for Life.

Recognition came in parallel at various points in my journey: being named a quarterfinalist for the 2024 GRAMMY Music Educator Award, receiving the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra's Choral Director of the Year Award in 2019, and earning the Excellence in Teaching Award from Wayne Central High School in 2011. These accolades are a testament to my commitment to excellence and innovation in music education.

A vision for change and progress

Change is the cornerstone of my vision for NYSSMA®. It is essential for us to evolve and adapt in response to our rapidly changing world. From my early days as a Zone Representative to my tenure as the 3rd Vice President and COMEA

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Chair, I have consistently championed change to enhance our organization's efficiency and effectiveness.

One of my key achievements was the creation of the County President's Executive Board in Zone 2, which streamlined policy and procedural changes in the Rochester area. And, of course, my work on the electronic manual committee reflects my commitment to integrating technology into our association.

As President, I aim to bring further transformative changes to NYSSMA®. My goals include:

1. **Strategic planning:** To look at our mission statement; re-affirm why our association exists and what future it envisions; engage stakeholders and get their input; create an Action Plan to figure out how to achieve our goals; and then monitor, evaluate, and track our progress regularly.
2. **Broadening our musical scope:** Restructuring Vocal Jazz into Contemporary Vocal Ensemble. This change will reflect the diverse musical interests of our students and align our programs with contemporary music education trends.
3. **Modernizing festivals:** Transitioning to electronic festival evaluations, which proved effective during the COVID-19 pandemic, and redesigning Majors sheets to offer a more comprehensive assessment range. I also plan to have NYSSMA's Adjudication Festival Committee (AFC) explore electronic methods for sight-reading assessments to replace the outdated rotating paper booklets.
4. **Enhancing organizational transparency and inclusivity:** Pushing for electronic elections, greater transparency in voting, and term limits for chair positions to ensure a dynamic and democratic organizational structure.
5. **Creating a mentorship committee:** Building on the collegiate connections we've made and helping young music teachers thrive in this ever-changing educational environment.
6. **Celebrating excellence:** Establishing awards for members and programs that stand out, thereby recognizing and encouraging excellence within our state, and further spotlighting schools in *School Music News* throughout the year.
7. **Developing a "Zone Rap Sheet":** Creating a Zone Representative Corner in *School Music News*. It will feature schools/programs in every zone.

Balancing responsibilities and advocacy

In continuing my teaching responsibilities while serving as NYSSMA® President, I recognize unique challenges in maintaining dual roles. However, I also see the advantage in this scenario, namely that my ongoing involvement in the classroom provides me with direct insight into the needs and aspirations of our students and educators. This perspective will guide my efforts as President, ensuring that our initiatives are relevant and impactful.

My ultimate goal as NYSSMA® President is to advocate for what is best for the children of New York State. The changes we implement must be thoughtful, balancing respect for our rich history with a vision for a progressive future. By fostering a culture of innovation, inclusivity, and excellence, we can better serve our students and teachers, enriching the musical landscape of our state.

I look forward to working collaboratively with all of you to realize this vision. Cooperatively, we can create a vibrant and dynamic future for NYSSMA®, ensuring that music education in New York State remains a beacon of excellence and inspiration. I thank you for entrusting me with the significant responsibility of the presidency. Now let's embark on this transformative journey together. ||

Musically yours,

Kathy Perconti

President, New York State School Music Association