
PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Kathy Perconti – NYSSMA® President



MUSIC FOR LIFE: THE LASTING IMPACT OF MUSICAL THEATRE

Bringing the best of all worlds together under one umbrella

March is Music In Our Schools Month, and for many of us it is also musical season. The sets are being built, rehearsals are running late, costumes are being fitted, and students are discovering their artistic abilities in ways that only school musicals make possible. After teaching music at every level—from babies to college—and directing and choreographing more musicals than I can count, I've come to believe this deeply: **musical theatre is “Music for Life” in action.**

As a music teacher and a parent of two now-adult children who quite literally grew up in rehearsal halls and backstage spaces, I've seen how musical theatre shapes students not just as performers, but as people.

Musical Theatre: Where Music Education Comes Alive

Musical theatre is one of the most complete musical experiences we can offer in our schools. It brings together singing, acting, movement, instrumental music, design, and storytelling into one shared experience. For many students, the school musical is the first—and sometimes only—place where they feel fully seen, valued, and successful.

Teaching All Ages, Seeing the Same Impact

Whether I was leading a Mommy & Me® class, teaching preschoolers to move to music, or coaching high school students through a complex musical score, the outcomes were strikingly similar. Music builds connection. Musical theatre simply amplifies that effect.

Young children learn cooperation, listening, and imagination through movement and song. Elementary students discover joy and pride in their accomplishments. Middle schoolers learn structure and find courage in performing. High

school students learn leadership, responsibility, and empathy. The musical becomes a microcosm of life, showing students how to work through challenges, depend on one another, and celebrate shared success.

Musical Theatre and the New York State Learning Standards for the Arts

Musical theatre aligns seamlessly with the New York State Learning Standards for the Arts, particularly through the four artistic processes:

Creating

Students make artistic choices during every rehearsal in a musical—interpreting characters, shaping phrasing, performing choreography, and connecting to achieve a united goal. They aren't just following directions; they are creating art.

Performing

Performing in a musical teaches far more than notes and choreography. Students learn perseverance, professionalism, and how to communicate with an audience. Standing on stage, they discover confidence that carries into presentations, interviews, and everyday life.

Responding

Rehearsals require reflection—what worked, what didn't, how can we improve? Students learn to give and receive feedback respectfully, building critical thinking and self-awareness.

Connecting

Musicals connect students to history, culture, literature, and each other. They explore themes of identity, justice, humor, loss, and joy, often seeing themselves reflected in the stories they tell.

Life Skills That Last Long After the Curtain Closes

Some of my proudest moments as a teacher have come years after the fact, when former students tell me how the musical helped them find their voice, overcome anxiety, or learn how to work with others. Most of them did not become professional musicians, but all of them became better humans.

Musical theatre teaches:

- Collaboration and teamwork
- Time management and responsibility
- Empathy and emotional expression
- Communication and confidence
- Inclusion and belonging

These are “Music for Life” skills—skills students carry into every profession and relationship.

March, Music, and Why We Do This

During Music In Our Schools Month, musicals remind our communities what music education truly looks like. They see students solving problems, supporting each other, taking risks, and creating something meaningful together. They see music education not as an “extra,” but as essential.

As music educators, we know the hours are long and the work is exhausting. But we also know the payoff is significant. Musical theatre is not just about the performance; it's about the journey, the growth, and the lifelong impact.

From the first lullaby to the final curtain call, music stays with us. Musical theatre is one of the most powerful ways we can give our students **“Music for Life.”** ||