

Russ Sperling  
Leadership Statement

I am a creator of collaborative teams that engage in open dialogue and shared leadership. I believe that bringing diverse voices to the table creates the best solutions. To develop a team, we build the capacity of all team members so everyone's skills and talents contribute to and raise the quality of the outcomes. Such a group can effectively identify needs and create solutions for the best outcomes, which in my work has often resulted in brand-new programming, leaving behind a legacy of work for others to build upon.

When I enter a new position, I find what is needed and create what is required to fill the gap. One such example came from a need to build leadership capacity for our local state music education associations, so we created the NAFME Western Division Leadership Seminar in 2015. This event has now been held annually in Las Vegas with participants from all over the country (with the exception of the pandemic). Anne Fennell and I created "Casting a Wider Net," a new stand-alone conference that broadened pathways and aimed to create music education programs that are more inclusive of all students. On the NAFME board, I advocated for, and the NEB approved changes to, the equitable treatment of past presidents, and the adding of the Western Music Education Association (India) to NAFME within the Western Division. I advocated for a Diversity Officer, which was a part of the conversations that led to the Cook Ross report on DEIA.

As California Music Educators Association (CMEA) President, I initiated a strategic plan that identified advocacy as a targeted goal. We turned our energies to advocacy during the great recession, a time when CMEA almost went bankrupt, and we, along with help from NAMM, created the Stand Up 4 Music Coalition and annual advocacy days in Sacramento. These advocacy efforts helped pass legislation for the writing and adopting our new California Arts Standards and Framework as well as other areas. This approach helped unify music education organizations across California, providing a common voice and building long-lasting relationships with all stakeholders that continue to grow today. I believe these collective actions helped save CMEA from its demise and boosted music education for all students in the state of California.

In my role as coordinator for visual and performing arts at the San Diego County Office of Education, I created the "Arts Empower Mega Conference," which for the first time gathered the local San Diego art education associations together for one conference that included dance, music, theatre and visual art. The lasting outcomes of this event were to bring recognition to arts education and its many contributions to public school education throughout the county's 42 school districts. This popular event has provided an opportunity for all arts educators to connect, share ideas, and learn from one another.

I led work on our San Diego Unified School District's first-ever Strategic Arts Education Plan that called for more equity, and we changed music education delivery models to deliver equitable access for all students. We are currently revising this plan for 2021-2026. I collaborated with

community leaders to create a new “VAPA Foundation” that raises funds to enhance arts and music education in San Diego schools.

Because of my passion for the LGBTQ cause and marching band, I collaborated with the San Diego Pride organization and local band directors to create the San Diego Pride Youth Marching Band, the only one of its type nationally. The band marches in San Diego’s largest civic event of the year, the San Diego Pride Parade. This band has connected the school district and its leadership, music educators, students, and families to the LGBTQ community while bringing pride and awareness through music.

I believe I have been successful in creating innovative initiatives and vital action steps to ensure all students experience the power that music education provides. I implement these ideas with clarity through positive relationships, while managing and leading with transparency, necessary resources, and clear and timely communication. My personal leadership statement is: “The world will be a better place when all our children have a robust arts education. I commit my vision, energy and skill to this end.”

At this time when NAFME continues to transform into a professional association that uplifts all voices and serves as the lead learning organization for music education over the next 100 years, I feel that my leadership vision, work ethic, and style would be well-suited for the presidency.