

David M. Brown – Equity Statement

Every child is afforded a well-rounded education according to “The Every Student Succeeds Act.” In fact, in the Law, it states, ***We must educate the well-rounded child inclusive of Music and the Arts.*** Music stands alone! Unfortunately, music sometimes doesn’t feel inclusive and welcoming to every child. In my career I have had the unfortunate opportunity to see programs that are exclusive. This is not done intentionally but if we do not look through the lens of Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Representations, we are most likely going to be exclusive. I am proud to have started this journey in New York State, as President, with NYSSMA Executive Council’s adoption of our Diversity Statement from which all components of our work is being done.

This is not an easy fix and change will not occur overnight but we need to be strategic and purposeful. This duty falls to many factions – public schools, teachers, and colleges, just to name a few. At the same time, we can’t just change and omit what we already do so well but we must add with creativity and awareness. We need to find a balance and, importantly, an equitable one. As President of NYSSMA, I was heartened to add Song Writing to our already full program of offerings at the State Level and when I attended the first Song Writing Concert at the 2021 Winter Conference my heart was full for a new idiom that provided an outlet for children that were never invited previously and most likely would not have been at the All State Experience. This was *scratching the surface*. It was a good start to a long needed paradigm shift. What other programs do we need to offer to be more welcoming and inclusive is a good question. Another important question is whether we dared to ask the children? That is one of my platforms, to get the voice of children when we create programs and initiatives. Is it equitable and inclusive to make decisions about children without asking them and more importantly, involving them in the process? I think not.

NYSSMA has *started* to diversify our Manual with underrepresented composers, and again this is just a small dent in what seems and is perceived as an impenetrable wall. What does it mean to be underrepresented? It is not only about color. What about gender, and other forms of underrepresentation? We need to continue to think globally about how and what we educate and ask the question – who are our clients and what are their needs? And I am not just speaking about children.

We have to start somewhere and when you have momentum there are endless possibilities. So my Equity Statement is to know and understand the needs of all children and meet those needs by offering music education opportunities to everyone. So we have to continue to find new ways, programs, and offerings to welcome more and more children **and** the teachers who educate our children. Remember the Law is to Educate **All** Children, not just some.