



**Statement of Candidate for 2026–2028 NAfME National President-Elect Judy Bush
at the 2025 NAfME National Leadership Assembly in June 2025.**

I want to begin by thanking members of the nominating committee and the National Executive Board for this opportunity to speak to you today. When my sons were young, they shared that although they loved both grandmas, they decided they liked one more than the other. I have a point, I promise. When I asked why, I was told that one grandma only bought them things, but the other spent time with them doing things. Quality time. Even at their young age, they understood that relationships are critical. I wonder if, as an organization, we focus more on providing resources and not enough about building relationships.

Attending National Assembly is like a homecoming. While we're all here for the business of NAfME and garnering cutting-edge information, we're also excited to see, reconnect with, and learn from our wonderful friends and colleagues in person. We can only take so much of talking to people in boxes like Hollywood squares. This time together is where some of our best ideas come from. I believe that our organization is second to none in terms of advocacy work, providing top-notch professional development, cutting-edge research, and DEIA resources. And yet, despite these strategic goals and accomplishments, we seem to be losing connections with both members and affiliates. If we're hitting the mark in terms of our strategic plan, what are we missing? Is the membership missing the type of relationship-building we're privileged to experience here at National Assembly? And if so, what do we do about it?

Gone are the days when music teachers joined this organization because it was the professional thing to do. Many music educators are active within their other content specific organizations, some taking the place of NAfME. Besides attending conferences with great content, there's opportunity to network and create lasting relationships with those who share professional experiences. You might think that I'm all for national conferences again, however, I served on the board that voted to end them because they were too expensive. With that decision, except for a successful research conference, we ended all in-person gatherings for the vast majority of members with no real opportunity to brainstorm any alternatives thanks to the pandemic. Our largest group of educators, those who teach elementary general music, choose to participate in content/pedagogical specific workshops and conferences where they look forward to learning by doing and reconnecting with others. Is there any incentive for them to be a NAfME member?

Many of our secondary educators join for their students to participate in MEA events like All State. It's a weak reason to join any organization, and as a result, some states are figuring out that they can do their own thing without NAfME. I don't share these thoughts with you to negate the essential work that NAfME does. I'm challenging us to look at how the membership perceives what we do, and whether or not it affects their teaching on a daily basis. This is an opportunity for us to make changes in how we think and operate, finding ways to view everything we do through the lens of the educator at every level.

Just a few challenges among many to consider:

- We should provide more opportunities similar to the Small Schools Initiative to give teachers within specific demographics a voice and means to network and problem solve.
- The DEIA committee might consider adjusting their purpose. Having every professional development, publication, and other ideas funneled through this one committee creates a backlog. Now that the committee has defined its philosophy, it can take on a more educational role, assisting committees, societies, and councils, as well as membership, to make educated decisions for themselves, providing resources and guidance where needed.
- We need to be more considerate of classroom teaching planning when providing curricular materials, articles, and content-specific PD. For example, sending out the jazz appreciation issue at the end of April defeats its purpose. Providing Music In Our Schools Month materials in March is too late to plan and use.
- How do we get essential information to membership they will actually read without overwhelming them? How do we get them excited about what the organization has to offer? We need to organize our offerings and communications in a way that is easy to digest and members anticipate.
- For the last three years, the General Music Council has offered a Saturday mini-conference every April which boasts the largest numbers of registrations for any PD we offer. What if each Society and Council found a time and topic each year that members could expect and look forward to?
- In an organization that represents all music educators from pre-K and beyond, I would love to see even more DEI in leadership, including those of differing disabilities, content areas, and teaching assignments, adjusting current practices and organization to include more pre-K-12 practitioners.

Briefly on the topic of teacher retention. Teachers don't leave the profession because they hate music. They leave because they are disrespected, treated like children, overworked, underpaid, and justifiably fearful. Much of this is way beyond NAFME's control. Some young teachers leave because their salaries are less than what they pay in childcare. Young people get into teaching music because of their love of making music, especially with others. We can assist teachers to find a way to teach through music, not always about music, reminding all of us that we are musicians first.

As a room full of great educators, it is time to pivot and lead our organization to be more engaging and relational in all we do, just as we would expect in our classrooms. In an organization that supports a discipline as emotional and creative as music education, isn't it ironic that we have become so cerebral about it all, instead of embracing that which makes music so powerful? It may sound old school, but I believe NAFME should be more purpose-driven and less program-driven.

Finally, the president of NAFME is not merely the face of NAFME, but the heart of NAFME. My hope is that whoever becomes the next president-elect, they will work to build more personal connections with membership, creating intentional opportunities to listen to and help our members develop relevant grassroots advocacy skills, curricular knowledge, practical application

of cutting-edge research, and a personal understanding of DEIA as it applies to all students within their school communities.

I would appreciate the opportunity to work together and spend quality time with members to take NAFME to the next chapter of excellence. Thank you.