



**National Association
for Music Education**

**Statement of Candidate for 2026–2028 NAFME National President-Elect Patrick K. Freer
at the 2025 NAFME National Leadership Assembly in June 2025.**

Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to share with you today. I'll begin with my background, talk about why I feel NAFME is so important, and share some of what I would like us to do together.

My home base is at Georgia State University, and I am proud to note that GSU graduates more Black and Brown students than any other institution in the country. We are one of the only universities to have eliminated achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity, or income. I am the chair of the Senate Executive Committee for our university and our representative to the University Systems Faculty Council. These are the highest ranking elected faculty positions in our university and the state of Georgia. I meet regularly with our president and provost. I work directly with our state governor, Brian Kemp, and University System Chancellor, Sonny Perdue, on policy issues affecting faculty. I've authored nearly 170 publications, and I am also fortunate to have taught and conducted choirs and orchestras in 40 states and 30 countries.

But other than this speech at this very moment, the most intense public speaking I ever did was give a TED Talk about my research on adolescent boys, singing and social connectedness. So welcome to my TED Talk. For a time, I also had a side career as a fitness coach, gym manager and competitive bodybuilder. I won many trophies along the way, and some competitions were broadcast on ESPN. So I'm sure you have questions. The answers, yes, you can still see my TED Talk online, but no, my ESPN bodybuilding videos are no longer visible. Thank the Lord.

I've held many leadership roles in NAFME, ACDA, and the National Collegiate Choral Organization. My favorite NAFME leadership role was in a much longer than usual term as editor of Music Educators Journal. I was drawn to this because of the sense of community I had when I pulled the latest issue of MEJ out of my school mailbox. I felt connected to a community of music teachers just like me. I was editor of MEJ when the journal shifted to online publication. I understood the financial reasons behind the change, but I also felt we lost a part of our community when we lost that printed version. But that's where you all in this National Assembly swooped in.

About the same time, state MEA conferences began to see large increases in attendance, and the subdivisions within our states, those districts, became more visible and robust. Thanks to you and to your predecessors, because our state leaders saved NAFME, not only by reinforcing our sense of community, but by creating a support structure that allowed us to thrive during the COVID pandemic to come. As Chris Woodside reminded us yesterday, music educators led the

charge to develop the types of online spaces that eventually enabled our NAFME Learning Center. As president-elect, I will support the expansion of virtual professional development for our members, especially for those who cannot partake in in-person activities due to family obligations, financial constraints, or geographic location.

I also have an interest in the Small Schools Initiative. As a youngster, I attended and graduated from a tiny rural school in western New York State, Go Bills, and I later taught in a rural school district in New Jersey. I know how isolating it can feel to be a new teacher in small and rural schools. So I want to support and continue development of early career educator mentoring programs such as those we see in various locations nationwide. As one example, I think that some of the mentoring efforts of the Kansas MEA are particularly strong. Now we certainly have mentoring initiatives in the NAFME blueprint, and I want to help us continue toward those goals.

I now teach in the urban core of downtown Atlanta, a city that has been at the forefront of civil rights issues since its founding, seeing many steps forward and several steps back. I adopted a son from Brazil, and we made our home in Atlanta. I saw firsthand how prejudice and intolerance impacted his daily life as he adjusted to living in the United States. My son is now an elementary music teacher, so I guess it runs in the family. But my experiences as his father have allowed DEI awareness that I might not have had otherwise. Regardless of the terms we use, DEI issues are central to nearly all we do in our classrooms, mine, and yours. I particularly resonated with one quote from NAFME 's 2021 Equity Symposium, when we fail to recognize, we devalue and disempower. That phrase holds much promise for how we might reframe some of the current political dialogue in a way that uplifts our members in the spirit of positivity with which Deb Confredo closed her remarks at the start of this assembly. I view diversity and equity as nouns, as the goals we hold to be preeminent. Inclusion, on the other hand, is best examined as a verb, as what we do in the pursuit of diversity and equity. It is my goal that NAFME be fully inclusive of our association's diversity and that our association hold equity as the expected outcome of our work.

My vision for my role in NAFME leadership is to be a facilitator of good work in progress, an identifier of tasks yet to be done, and an enabler of processes through which the activities will be accomplished. Leadership is political, in the very best sense of the word. It is the art of sharing and working with people to recognize and achieve our common goals. This will require that I be visible, positive, and responsive. I love attending and meeting teachers at state conferences, which is a good thing, since I aim to travel to as many of them as humanly possible during my terms as president-elect and president.

To recap, I've shared some of my specific policy priorities and among these are, and most important of these is identifying common goals that focus us on what unites rather than what divides. As president-elect, I will listen and learn and listen and learn more and more. Thank you for your dedication and thank you for considering my candidacy for President-elect.