

NYSSMA Awards 2024/25

NYSSMA Distinguished Service Award: Mr. Alan Orloff



Alan has been an extraordinary leader in music education, serving as the NYSSMA Government Relations Committee Chair from 2012 to 2023. Alan took on the GRC role with commitment and energy. A fiercely dedicated and passionate leader, Alan has been dedicated to maintaining strong Government Relations for the purpose of building, growing and maintaining music programs throughout the state of New York. His commitment to advocacy for music students and music education has been both tremendous and contagious. Every March, he organized and hosted the Joseph R. Sugar Day in Albany, a vital event for fostering relationships with our state legislators. Alan also led the New York State delegation for NAFME Hill Day in Washington, D.C. each June, ensuring that our voices are heard on a national level. Additionally, Alan has represented NYSSMA and engaged with important stakeholders at New York State School Boards, and NYS PTA conferences annually. His ability to engage with all constituents at these events has been a crucial part of NYSSMA's advocacy efforts. What truly sets Alan apart is his unwavering belief in the importance of music education. He continually reminds us that music education is essential for a well-rounded education and for building "whole human beings". He reminds us that music is the key ingredient of our culture. His conviction that NYSSMA must advance music education across New York State has inspired us all, and he has truly earned the honor associated with NYSSMA Distinguished Service Award.

Austin Day -- NYSSMA Music Education Innovation Award



Since joining Sleepy Hollow Middle-High School, Austin Day has embraced a unique challenge: to create a brand-new music program from the ground up. He has exceeded all expectations through his visionary approach to music production and education. Austin's curriculum is a testament to his dedication to fostering student creativity. By harnessing his extensive knowledge of music technology, he has designed a learning environment where technical limitations are nonexistent. His students are encouraged to explore their creativity fully, supported by the latest software and hardware that he has meticulously integrated into his program. Austin ensures that every student, regardless of their background, has access to the tools they need to thrive. Austin has transformed his music production program into a beacon of opportunity. He has created a space where students from all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds can collaborate, innovate, and succeed. His commitment to inclusivity ensures that every student feels valued and empowered. Mr. Day has become a mentor to his students, guiding them not only in music but also in personal development. His after-school initiatives empower students to take charge of their learning. They learn to produce, perform, and share their music, providing a safe and supportive space for artistic expression. Austin Day exemplifies the qualities that the NYSSMA Music Education Innovation Award seeks to recognize. His passion for music, commitment to educational innovation, and dedication to his students make him a most deserving recipient of this prestigious award.

Brian Wagner Yeung -- NYSSMA Music Education Innovation Award



Brian Wagner Yeung has demonstrated exceptional visionary leadership in his role as the Neurodiversity and Accessibility Chair for NYSSMA. Under his guidance, critical issues affecting music classrooms have been addressed with innovative and sustainable solutions. Through his workshops, Brian teaches educators how to validate feelings, listen without judgment, and provide safe spaces for students to express themselves. He empowers teachers to create interactive activities that consider sensory preferences and nurture students' passions, ultimately fostering an environment where every learner can thrive. Brian established the first NYSSMA Academy, a program created in direct response to the requests of collegiate students seeking resources and training dedicated to inclusivity, particularly in working with neurodiverse students. Understanding the need for specialized seminars and workshops, Brian developed a program that would provide vital support and knowledge to educators across the state. Brian's efforts have laid the groundwork for a more inclusive future in music education. His dedication to empowering educators and supporting neurodiverse students is commendable and truly deserving of this award, the NYSSMA Music Education Innovation Award.

Holden Maiorana -- NYSSMA Early Career Achievement Award



Since joining the Spackenkill High School community in 2018, Holden Maiorana has not only redefined the choral program but has also become a source of inspiration for students and colleagues alike. From the very beginning, Mr. Maiorana demonstrated a unique ability to think outside the box. Whether it was launching the a-cappella group Spacka-pella, or adapting to the challenges posed by the pandemic when performances moved outdoors; his passion, energy, and resourcefulness were abounding! His commitment to providing a high-quality musical experience for his students, despite the less-than-accommodating circumstances, was nothing short of extraordinary. Holden's influence extends far beyond the walls of Spackenkill. In his early career he has shared his expertise across a multitude of counties, conducting All-County Festivals and inspiring students through workshops and conferences. His ability to infuse fun into learning while maintaining a rigorous focus on musical excellence characterizes his genuine talent and serious commitment. In his first six years Holden has doubled choral participation at Spackenkill, developed innovative projects using music technology, and supported students in preparing for auditions and festivals. From creating engaging TikTok projects to commissioning original works, he continually seeks ways to enrich the educational experience for his students. Holden Maiorana embodies the spirit of the NYSSMA Early Career Achievement Award.

Jackie Kovacs -- NYSSMA Established Educator Award



In a world where genuine impact often feels fleeting, Jackie Kovacs, music teacher at Maine-Endwell High School, has proven herself an inspiration. She is a revered teacher whose magnetic presence transforms the lives of all the students fortunate enough to cross her path. In a school with fewer than 800 students, over 300 young musicians flourish under Ms. Kovacs' guidance, as Jackie demonstrates an extraordinary ability to connect with each individual student. One of her bands includes nearly 120 members, all thriving in an environment that celebrates each student's contribution and champions their excellence. Her ensembles consistently earn Gold and Gold with Distinction honors. What truly sets Ms. Kovacs apart is her profound empathy and the unwavering support she extends to her students. She empowers them to be the best they can be. She fosters a nurturing environment where young people are valued, understood, and encouraged to reach their full potential. She embodies the essence of a role model for the next generation of leaders. Her influence extends far beyond the classroom. Whether as an adjudicator, chairperson, conductor, or performer, Jackie Kovacs consistently excels at the highest levels of her profession. Her dedication to NYSSMA and NYSBDA showcase her genuine commitment to music education. As President-Elect of NYSBDA she exemplifies a great spirit, work ethic, and dedication. Her humility and selflessness shine through. She never seeks the spotlight, is always willing to be a leader when a leader is needed and is equally ready to roll up her sleeves and lend a hand. Her band room is more than just a space for music, it is a sanctuary where students feel safe, heard, supported, and connected. We honor Jackie Kovacs with the NYSSMA Established Educator Award for her outstanding

professional achievements and for the heart and soul that she pours into her daily interaction with students and colleagues alike.

Patricia Dunn -- NYSSMA Established Educator Award



Patricia “Trish” Dunn is an extraordinary educator, a dedicated musician, and an inspiring mentor. Trish has dedicated more than 20 years of her life to education, with the last 17 of those years serving the East Meadow School District. Over this time, she has become a cornerstone of the music program, particularly at the middle and now high school level. Her journey has shaped her career and has profoundly impacted the lives of countless students. Ms. Dunn embodies what it means to be an educator. She is dedicated, passionate, and endlessly innovative. Her supervisors write that Trish has an incredible ability to break down complex musical concepts, ensuring that each student feels successful, whether in a small group lesson, or a large ensemble setting. She consistently sets high expectations for her students, knowing that they excel and thrive in an environment where they are pushed to reach their full potential. Her commitment to nurturing and fostering musical talent led her to establish an auditioned Wind Ensemble program at Woodland Middle School, an innovation that continues to thrive 15 years later. During the pandemic she additionally supported students organizing “caw-fee tawks” to connect with her students during lunch, fostering relationships that make her students feel valued, appreciated, and understood. Trish Dunn is a role model and a mentor to all her students. She takes her musicianship seriously, continuing to perform with prestigious ensembles, demonstrating that lifelong learning and passion for music are at the core of her identity. Through her dedication, innovation, and passion for music education, Trish Dunn exemplifies the qualities of the NYSSMA Established Educator Award.

Long Beach School District -- NYSSMA Presidential Citation



Long Beach is an oceanfront city in Nassau County, taking up a central section of the Long Beach Barrier Island with direct access to the Atlantic Ocean. In 2013, many of us heard about the vast devastation that came to this region in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. The Long Beach community, School District and the District Music Program faced a daunting challenge. Yet, a spirit permeated the community, and through collective efforts and an unwavering commitment to the arts, the Long Beach School District witnessed a remarkable resurgence. There was an outpouring of support from generous donations of instruments to the tireless dedication of parents and community members. The district responded by significantly enhancing the music program with two major purchases of instruments. Throughout the unprecedented challenges that we all experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, the precedent had been set, and the resolve only strengthened. Rather than retreating, Long Beach expanded the Performing Arts staff to ensure that every student-maintained access to music education. The result, the Long Beach School District today celebrates not just the survival of the music programs, but a thriving resurgence. Participation numbers have rebounded, and students continue to achieve accolades at All County, All-State, and All Eastern levels. The community's resolve is further exemplified by a Scholarship Program which honors a cherished retired music educator. Nearly \$10,000 raised by community music supporters demonstrates the collective belief that every child deserves access to music education. Long Beach is particularly proud of its cutting-edge Electronic Music Program and a rigorous IB Music Course, which challenges students to innovate and create. The NYSSMA Presidential Award recognizes the Long Beach School District, Administration, Community and Board of Education. Long Beach is a district and a community that exemplifies the transformative power of music education.

Nanuet Union Free School District -- NYSSMA Presidential Citation



Nanuet is a small district with a remarkably robust music program and a firm commitment to high standards. Nanuet has a comprehensive curriculum which includes a rigorous general music program for grades K-8 and mandatory music ensemble participation for all students in grades 5-6, and over 70% of students in grades 3-4 participate in instrumental music. The Nanuet music program blends innovation with the best of traditional music education. Their approach fosters creativity and encourages collaboration at every level. Nanuet boasts a student-led music technology club allowing for exploration in composing and recording, and an innovative 6th-grade ukulele curriculum. Students regularly engage in collaborative problem-based learning projects, such as 5th graders writing lyrics and songs to accompany a science project. The curriculum has abundant examples of innovation meeting tradition with the use of software such as Scratch, Note Flight, and Soundtrap. The Nanuet UFSD covers all costs for student participation in NYSSMA festivals and events, ensuring accessibility for every student. They host festivals and conferences, and foster collaboration and networking among music educators across the region. The Nanuet Board of Education exemplifies unwavering support for music education, recognizing its profound impact on student development and well-being. Through robust annual financial support, the Board ensures that the music department continues to thrive. The School District fosters a culture that celebrates musical achievement and encourages participation. Nanuet empowers students to explore their musical talents and promotes a lifelong appreciation for the arts. They exemplify what it means to have a thriving music program. The district embraces a culture where teachers, students, and the community work together to foster creativity and build musical skills that last a lifetime. The NYSSMA Presidential Award is presented to the Nanuet School District.