

What is NYSSMA?

NYSSMA is the New York State School Music Association. It is a professional association of music teachers from throughout New York State. NYSSMA's parent organization is The National Association for Music Education. NYSSMA's mission is to advocate for and promote music education in New York. They sponsor conferences and professional development opportunities for its teacher members, proactively advocate for music education throughout the state, and present many programs for students in its member schools.

What are the NYSSMA Solo and Ensemble Festivals?

NYSSMA is best known for sponsoring festivals each spring in which students have the opportunity to perform solos and small ensembles (duets, trios, etc.) for an impartial adjudication. This process has long been held up as one of the finest examples of authentic assessment and is designed to help students to improve their musical abilities. Participation in NYSSMA is voluntary and provides students an opportunity to evaluate their own level of achievement and to set goals for making progress. Judges, most of whom are chosen from outside our area, hear each student play a graded selection from the NYSSMA manual, prescribed scales and a short sight reading selection (8 measures). Students are then given a written report with comments on their performance and a grade. Grades range from the relatively rare Outstanding through Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Fair and Needs Improvement for Levels I-IV, and A+ through D- in Levels V and VI. In some cases, students may receive "Comments Only." Students who feel that they are not well prepared and would not like a score can request "Comments Only" (Also known as a Festival Rating). If a judge feels that a low score may make the experience a less positive one for the student, they may suggest "Comments Only." This is also given if student's solo is not listed in the current NYSSMA Manual.

NYSSMA Levels

- Levels I - very easy - elementary
- II - easy - advanced elementary, middle school
- III - medium - middle school
- IV - medium difficult - advanced middle school, high school
- V - difficult - advanced high school
- VI - very difficult - only for the most advanced soloists

NYSSMA festival grades provide a standard that is used for acceptance to all-county festivals, many music camps, and can be included in college applications. The festivals also serve as the audition sites for the All-State Band, Chorus, Orchestra and Jazz Ensembles (grades 10 and 11 only are eligible).