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Colorado State MTA

A Journey Toward DEI

By Andrew Cooperstock, NCTM, Boulder, Colorado

In this issue, we learn from Andrew Cooperstock, president of Colorado State Music Teachers Association, about how the state of Colorado created a Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion position at the local (Denver Area Music Teachers Association) and state levels.

—Leah N. Claiborne

With its awe-inspiring natural beauty and longstanding appreciation of arts and culture, Colorado greets 90 million visitors from all over each year. Our residents, friendly and welcoming, are rural and urban, young and old, economically and academically diverse, and from a multiplicity of backgrounds. Building upon this atmosphere, CSMTA recently revised its mission statement to underscore “supporting the professionalism of its members through education, advocacy, and community” and “strengthening our shared and welcoming musical community with kindness and respect.”

With ideas about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion already percolating in our organization through local programming—as a new prize in our state solo competition, as significant focus for a state conference and more—meaningful interest had been growing in our state over the past few years. In fact, Denver

Area Music Teachers Association President Ben Raznick is quick to point out that DAMTA had been so moved that it installed a Vice President for DEI even before MTNA national did! With this inspiring commitment from a local association, along with the creation of a parallel position at national, it seemed natural that CSMTA pursue the idea at the state level.

From Ben:

We have found in DAMTA that by making intentional space for DEI conversations we are able to highlight our own blind spots, for example lack of awareness and prejudice. Sometimes these conversations are difficult and uncomfortable, and that’s OK. We grow from



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these moments, individually and collectively, and become better music educators, leaders and people. With our new VP of DEI position, we hope to encourage all voices from across our state to contribute to these conversations and become a Colorado coalition for change.

Following some small-group brainstorming a year ago with Ben, Bylaws Chair and President-elect Emily Book McGree, Immediate Past President Uri Ayn Rovner and others, I reached out to each CSMTA board member for their thoughts. Common questions were: Why do we need a VP for DEI? What does DEI mean for our state? What would this person do? In every case, casual conversations grew enthusiastic, and we came to a consensus that such an officer could be of invaluable help to all our other administrative areas, from membership

to student activities, teacher enrichment to conferences. After earnest debate at our state conference last June, we voted to add this position to our bylaws, and esteemed pianist and composer Chee-Hwa Tan, from Pikes Peak Music Teachers Association, Colorado Springs, agreed to accept an appointment as our very first VP for DEI.

Chee-Hwa's wise plan over the past few months has been to attend a meeting of each of our 15 local associations and simply to listen, inviting the sharing of interests and concerns. Many members want to explore a more inclusive repertoire. Others are seeking help teaching neurodiverse students. Still others are concerned with financial or geographical accessibility. Chee-Hwa's next task is to create a detailed position description—a roadmap for moving forward. Since penning the lead article for our October *Notes & News* quarterly on her

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own search for professional identity, Chee-Hwa tells me that her personal ideas have already evolved in a short time.

A few of her current thoughts:

To me, having variety (diversity), giving value to each person (equity), and advocating for opportunities and resources for children and adults who might otherwise never experience the power of music (inclusion) make us more whole as individuals and musicians, thus resulting in healthier community.

As DEI pertains to the teaching and learning of music:

Diversity—Representation of a variety of cultures/ethnicities, socio-economic levels, ages, musical styles, repertoire canons, curriculum, instruments and skill levels.

Equity—Access to music study for all student populations, including the vulnerable, underserved, at-risk, special needs and neurodiverse. Access to teacher support in areas with geographical, economic or other limitations.

Inclusion—Cultivation of belonging through music study. Celebration students' own cultural heritage and identity. Collaboration with other instruments.

How can we identify common ground on which to unite and collaborate?

I believe that the power of music is transformational and that everyone can make music.

I am grateful for the many dedicated and visionary teachers in Colorado—too many to name individually—and CSMTA is proud to be the first state affiliate to have created a VP for DEI, already an inspiration for others who are interested in following suit. I am also pleased to note that for its important work in this area and more, CSMTA has been selected as the 2024 MTNA State Affiliate of the Year.

Andrew Cooperstock, NCTM, is professor of piano at the University of Colorado and president of Colorado State Music Teachers Association. He has recorded discs of American music for Deutsche Grammophon, Bridge, Naxos and Azica.



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