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Dear NYSTEA Family,

Why am I getting a note in the mail from NYSTEA? Why wasn't this an email? What could be so important that they need to create a whole mailing? Well I hope I can provide some answers to all of that.

For those of you who don't know me, I am Tony Ravinsky and I have been part of the NYSTEA family since 2005. I have been on the board of directors since 2009 and a co-chair for the Student Conference since 2011. NYSTEA is truly a family, and I cherish the connections and relationships I have fostered over the last 17 years. They are all invaluable to me as a person, and have helped me build a program in which my students, families, district and community participate, thrive and find direction.

So now, why this letter? I have been fortunate enough to be close to many founding NYSTEA members and talk with them frequently. We talk about shows we have seen, shows we are doing, shows we are thinking of doing, things we can borrow, and ways to continue to foster the NYSTEA family. We are always talking about how we need "new, fresh ideas and perspectives" in the family, and how many great opportunities there are for our students through NYSTEA.

At the beginning of the summer I was having a conversation with John Fredricksen about how NYSTEA initially built its membership without email. First off, being able to build a membership and community without email blows my mind. But, what stuck in my mind the most was that they would mail a letter every month just talking about what's going on around the state in educational theater. I thought that was so great, and so simple. Knowing how much most people enjoy receiving mail that isn't just bills and propaganda, I proposed this idea to the NYSTEA Board. So, for the 2022-23 school year, the NYSTEA membership will be receiving a personal letter from a board member about their work in educational theatre.

So now that you know the "why" of this letter, here is my "what". During another conversation, I was talking about how "I am only a music teacher", and am not trained in theater. It was quickly brought to my attention that I am "only a music teacher" that produces, and directs quality shows. I am "only a music teacher" that gets students engaged in theater and introduces them to experiences that are present only inside the theater classroom. I am "only a music teacher" that has helped to create lifelong friendships amongst my students that

are still thriving years later because of the theater experience. And finally, I am “only a music teacher” that gives my students a place where they can be themselves and in a safe space to be whomever they want to be.

I say this because it doesn't matter how long you have been teaching, how many degrees you have, or where you went to school. What matters is that we, as theater educators, continue to teach our students to be better people and participants in an increasingly more connected world. We provide experiences that they wouldn't get in a traditional classroom, and we help them to discover their identities in a rapidly changing society. They might not go into theater, but they will bring the skills and charisma developed as a theater student as they go out into the world to create a better place.

I hope that our NYSTEA conversations have given you some motivation to get through those tough rehearsals, or tough conversations as you advocate for your program. We do what we do for our students, and seeing the joy on their faces after a performance, or hearing from them years after graduation continue to motivate me. I wish you all the best with the start of your new school year, and I hope to see you all soon. I miss seeing the NYSTEA family in person, and look forward to reconnecting as we begin to explore in-person events again!

Tony Ravinsky

NYSTEA Board of Directors since 2009