

In Conversation with President Mark Rabideau



Many of us are struggling. Struggling to continue to keep our communities healthy in what we hoped by now to call a “post-pandemic world.” Struggling to make substantive progress toward fostering greater inclusivity and belonging on our campuses, even while we see lawmakers pass bills that allow educators to refuse to refer to transgender students by their preferred pronouns and limit discussions about sexual orientation or gender identity with students of any age. Struggling to imagine what we would do if the unimaginable happened at our school.

Our prayers are with the families and faculties of

Covenant School

Thurston High School

Columbine High School

Heritage High School

Deming Middle School

Fort Gibson Middle School

Buell Elementary School

Lake Worth Middle School

University of Arkansas

Junipero Serra High School

Santana High School

Bishop Neumann High School

Pacific Lutheran University

Granite Hills High School

Lew Wallace High School

Martin Luther King, Jr High School

Appalachian School of Law

Washington High School

Conception Abbey

Benjamin Tasker Middle School

University of Arizona

Lincoln High School

John McDonogh High School

Red Lion Area Junior High School

Case Western Reserve University

Rocori High School

Ballou High School

Bowen High School
Red Lake Senior High School
Harlan Community Academy High School
Campbell County High School
Milwee Middle School
Roseburg High School
Pine Middle School
Essex Elementary School
Duquesne University
Platte Canyon High School
Weston High School
West Nickel Mines School
Joplin Memorial Middle School
Henry Foss High School
Compton Centennial High School
Virginia Tech
Success Tech Academy
Miami Carol City Senior High School
Louisiana Technical College
Mitchell High School
EO Green Junior High School
Northern Illinois University
Lakota Middle School
Knoxville Central High School
Willoughby South High School
Henry Ford High School
University of Central Arkansas
Dillard High School
Dunbar High School
Hampton University
Harvard College
Larose-Cut Off Middle School
International Studies Academy
Skyline College
Discovery Middle School

DeKalb School
Deer Creek Middle School
Ohio State University
Mumford High School
University of Texas
Kelly Elementary School
Marinette High School
Aurora Central High School
Millard South High School
Martinsville West Middle School
Worthing High School
Millard South High School
Highlands Intermediate School
Cape Fear High School
Chardon High School
Episcopal School of Jacksonville
Oikos University
Hamilton High School
Perry Hall School
Normal Community High School
University of South Alabama
Banner Academy South
University of Southern California
Sandy Hook Elementary School
Apostolic Revival Center Christian School
Taft Union High School
Osborn High School
Stevens Institute of Business and Arts
Hazard Community and Technical College
Chicago State University
Lone Star College-North
Cesar Chavez High School
Price Middle School
University of Central Florida
New River Community College

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Ossie Ware Mitchell Middle School
Ronald E McNair Discovery Academy
North Panola High School
Carver High School
Agape Christian Academy
Sparks Middle School
North Carolina A&T State University
Stephenson High School
Brashear High School
West Orange High School
Arapahoe High School
Edison High School
Liberty Technology Magnet High School
Hillhouse High School
Berrendo Middle School
Purdue University
South Carolina State University
Los Angeles Valley College
Charles F Brush High School
Georgia Regents University
Academy of Knowledge Preschool
Benjamin Banneker High School
D. H. Conley High School
East English Village Preparatory Academy
Paine College
Georgia Gwinnett College
John F Kennedy High School
Seattle Pacific University
Reynolds High School
Indiana State University
Albemarle High School
Fern Creek Traditional High School
Langston Hughes High School
Marysville Pilchuck High School

Miami Carol City High School
Rogers State University
Rosemary Anderson High School
Wisconsin Lutheran High School
Frederick High School
Tenaya Middle School
Bethune-Cookman University
Pershing Elementary School
Wayne Community College
JB Martin Middle School
Southwestern Classical Academy
Savannah State University
Harrisburg High School
Umpqua Community College
Northern Arizona University
Texas Southern University
Tennessee State University
Winston-Salem State University
Mojave High School
Lawrence Central High School
Franklin High School
Muskegon Heights High School
Independence High School
Madison High School
Antigo High School
University of California-Los Angeles
Jeremiah Burke High School
Alpine High School
Townville Elementary School
Vigor High School
Linden McKinley STEM Academy
June Jordan High School for Equity
Union Middle School
Mueller Park Junior High School
West Liberty-Salem High School

King City High School
North Park Elementary School
North Lake College
Freeman High School
Mattoon High School
Rancho Tehama Elementary School
Aztec High School
Wake Forest University
Italy High School
NET Charter High School
Marshall County High School
Sal Castro Middle School
Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School
Great Mills High School
Central Michigan University
Huffman High School
Frederick Douglass High School
Forest High School
Highland High School
Dixon High School
Santa Fe High School
Noblesville West Middle School
University of North Carolina Charlotte
STEM School Highlands Ranch
Edgewood High School
Palm Beach Central High School
Providence Career & Technical Academy
Fairley High School (school bus)
Canyon Springs High School
Dennis Intermediate School
Florida International University
Central Elementary School
Cascade Middle School
Davidson High School
Prairie View A & M University

Central Academy of Excellence
Cleveland High School
Robert E Lee High School
Cheyenne South High School
Grambling State University
Blountsville Elementary School
Holmes County, Mississippi (school bus)
Prescott High School
College of the Mainland
Wynbrooke Elementary School
UNC Charlotte
Riverview Florida (school bus)
Second Chance High School
Carman-Ainsworth High School
Williwaw Elementary School
Monroe Clark Middle School
Central Catholic High School
Jeanette High School
Eastern Hills High School
DeAnza High School
Ridgway High School
Reginald F Lewis High School
Saugus High School
Pleasantville High School
Waukesha South High School
Oshkosh High School
Catholic Academy of New Haven
Bellaire High School
North Crowley High School
McAuliffe Elementary School
South Oak Cliff High School
Texas A&M University-Commerce
Sonora High School
Western Illinois University
Oxford High School

Denver East High School

East Carter High School

Richland High School

Frontier Middle School

Nothing can prepare us for tragedies that cut this deep into our souls, nor should preparing for acts so heinous become part of our regiment. Growing-up as a welfare kid who would later in life struggle with mental illness, I am, however, ever-grateful for the music teachers who taught me lessons that transcend those expected of us on the stage: lessons of resilience.

One such lesson was strengthening our internal fortitude as developed within the solitude of the practice room. I wrote about this for 21CM Magazine in August 2015 and thought it appropriate to share excerpts this month with our CMS community.

“David Taylor – Embracing the Joy of the Struggle”

Concertino for Bass Trombone and Trombone Choir by Eric Ewazen saw its world premiere at the 1996 International Trombone Festival and featured a man who many would regard as the greatest bass trombonist to ever approach the instrument: Dave Taylor. Simply put, Taylor transformed an instrument relegated to playing whole notes below the staff and doomed to counting rests for a living into virtuosity.

A doctoral student at the host institution, I was invited to participate in an octet that accompanied Taylor this auspicious occasion. As a trombonist, when you are given the opportunity to deliver the premiere of renowned composer as performed by the world’s greatest bass trombonist, it feels almost too good to be true. As a young man just beginning to ask questions about building a life in the arts, unexpected moments in the trenches can become transformative, as this proved to be.

The first rehearsal for the piece was in the basement of the University of Illinois’ Smith Music Hall with Ewazen providing direction and insight. I remember him as equally welcoming and appreciative as he was articulate and asserting. The ensemble was well prepared, the composer worked us hard, and we responded in suit. Finishing feeling both pleased and exhausted, we knew the real work would begin tomorrow, with the soloist.

Depending upon whom you ask, impressions of Dave Taylor range the spectrum from “...was he even 5 tall?” to “...all I remember is being terrified by him.” He plays an enormous horn and has an even bigger sound. Also, he’s from New York and fully embraces his Italian-American heritage with a big Brooklyn accent to top it off. Think Tommy DeVito from Goodfellas holding a bass trombone.

So, when Taylor walked through the door, the entire ensemble was excited (and a touch nervous) to meet him. We all knew how he began his career — under Leopold Stokowski in the American Symphony Orchestra and Pierre Boulez in the New York Philharmonic. We’d all heard his recordings with the Rolling Stones, Aretha Franklin, and Blood, Sweat & Tears as well as Miles Davis, Frank Sinatra, and Itzhak Perlman.

In interviews, Taylor talks about the “disconcerting nature” of toggling between playing “trombonistically perfect” and “getting away from the trombone at the same time,” but I can tell you any toggling is imperceptible to the human ear. He is pitch perfect every time he places the horn against his face. How is this possible?

Taylor toggled in rehearsal, too — embracing us when things went well and “voicing his concern,” which was like he just threw a sheet of glass at your throat. In a happier moment, I vividly remember him placing his hands on both sides of my face and saying, “Mark that was beautiful. You should come to New York. You can stay with me. You’ll make it.” I could feel his deep sincerity and genuine excitement for making music together. It was real. Although I am not certain he was ready to open up his home to me 15 measures in our relationship.

Taylor’s directness was a lot for some to handle. Rehearsals were long and the work taxing. But what I t

also to embrace the challenge and the struggle associated with striving for perfection.

Pushing away the harsh rejection in favor of his warmth, I approached Taylor when we were on break to him how he had accomplished so much, mastered the instrument, and truly carried his artistry across the boundaries of the genre. Or, to put it most succinctly, when you are already the world's greatest bass trombonist, why practice?

I remember him locking eyes with me, an amused smile playing at the corners of his mouth, and saying that deep Brooklyn baritone, "You know the story of Sisyphus? He's condemned to an eternity of repeating the same meaningless and impossible task: to push a boulder to the top of a peak, only to see it roll down again. Every day I strive to perfect this instrument even though I know it is impossible. So why do I do it? Because like Sisyphus, I have found meaning in "embracing the joy of the struggle." Although often feeling short on wisdom, this hit me as among my earliest lessons on why a life lived through the arts offers so much to all of us.

Making music, like life itself, will not always be easy. It simply does not work that way. But what you have learned in the solitude of the practice room and in the collaborative space of the rehearsal hall is that being tough enough to hear the truth is a big part of excelling at anything that is really worth fighting for. Whether you achieve greatness in the world's concert halls, or teach elementary students music, or simply continue to play in your community orchestra, the lessons you learn while "embracing the joy of the struggle" will serve you well.

Today, the "truth" can often be brutal. Allowing ourselves to grapple with the truth is, however, the first step in advocating for change.

During the ceremonies commemorating the lives of Evelyn Dieckhaus (9-years old), Hallie Scruggs (9-years old), William Kinney (9-years old), Katherine Koonce (60-years old), Cynthia Peak (61-years old), and M Hill (61-years old), music will be present in the healing of those who love most those lost.

As music faculty, we too, have the ability to build resilience within our students through the rigor of our music-making. I have to believe this is true. I hope you will, too.

Thanks for joining the conversation and hang in there.

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