

## Introduction

Educational stakeholders agree effective Professional Development (PD) is a crucial element in retaining teachers, improving teaching practices, and increasing student achievement. Across the nation, preK–12 music teachers and their colleagues in all disciplines participate annually in mandated PD.

Music teachers frequently are asked to participate in non-musically oriented PD. When attending nonmusic PD with their colleagues, music teachers can gain strategies-in-common that support student learning and districtwide or statewide educational initiatives. However, non-musical PD rarely helps teachers to improve in the critical areas of strengthening music curriculum, refining music assessment practices, and organizing materials to best support students' music learning.

What constitutes effective professional development for music teachers? The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) offers music teachers a number of musical PD events: the Biennial Music Educators National Conference, which alternates with Biennial Regional Music Educators National Conference; the Annual National Music Education Week; and on the state level, annual State Music Educators Association Conferences. Many music teachers find such conferences useful for gaining new ideas and connecting with other music teachers.

But music teachers cannot rely solely on conferences targeted at a broad audience of music teachers. They require PD containing characteristics researchers in general education and music education have identified over the past 20 years as essential. Music teachers need long-term, coherent, contextually supported, and music-based PD that differentiates varied needs within a community of music teachers.

When those important characteristics are present in PD structures, music teacher learning is supported. In turn, students benefit from music teachers' improved music teaching practices, and their music achievement increases. The purpose of this document is to help inform teachers, administrators, and professional development providers about research-based characteristics that ensure consistently effective PD for music teachers.

**1. Effective Teacher Professional Development *differentiates* between needs of beginning and experienced teachers.**

- Professional development is not “one size fits all.”
- Beginning teachers (zero to four years' experience) need a smooth entry into the profession supported by well-structured mentoring programs.
- Early- to mid-career teachers (four to nine years' experience) need opportunities for organized, reflective study of teaching practice. They

need education and support in making changes to improve student achievement.

- Veteran teachers (ten-plus years' experience) need to be involved in processes that help them organize their wisdom in ways that will help newcomers. They also need ways to stay current with contemporary educational policy and expectations.

## 2. Effective Teacher Professional Development is **musical**.

- While music teachers can benefit from non-music oriented PD, they benefit *most* from PD tailored specifically to their musical needs.

### BEGINNING TEACHER EXAMPLES

Novice teachers are concerned about whether they have sufficient and correct musical knowledge. They are also concerned with representing and transferring this knowledge to their students. Beginning music teachers need professional development to deepen the content knowledge needed for their teaching assignment.

*Ron, a young high school band teacher and trumpeter, plays in a community orchestra. There he engages in active music making and is immersed in musical content that gives him ideas for his own ensemble. He makes professional and musical connections with others. He feels less isolated, improves his musicianship, and has a chance to think deeply about what's needed to perform with a group, much as he asks his students to do every day.*

*Sue, a recent graduate and an instrumental music education major, is now in her first year of teaching middle school general music and chorus. She has enrolled in voice and guitar lessons at her local community school.*

*Katie, an elementary band teacher, goes one night a week to her local university to meet with other elementary teachers who want to learn how to incorporate improvisation and composition in beginning instrumental music. They eat pizza, share ideas, and practice techniques in improvisation and composition with one of the jazz music education faculty members.*

### EXPERIENCED TEACHER EXAMPLES

Experienced teachers need to continue to refine their teaching techniques, and maintain a high level of musicianship. In this era of focused student

assessment, student achievement-oriented teacher evaluations, and teacher accountability, experienced teachers will benefit from the same types of **musical** content development listed above for beginning teachers, with an emphasis on mentoring in formal and informal ways.

*Debbie is an elementary strings teacher with ten years' experience. She meets for one afternoon every month with other strings teachers in her county, all of whom have release time and a box lunch. They read new string ensemble music together and take turns conducting their "teacher orchestra."*

*Jesse is a veteran high school choir director. Each week he hosts a "healthy voice class" with all the choir teachers in the district. The teachers share warm-ups and learn techniques for teaching and learning proper vocal technique, both to prevent teacher injury and to promote correct technique among their students. The weekly voice class is also an opportunity for Jesse to take half-an-hour before or after to mentor the two beginning choir teachers in the district.*

*Sean is a high school band teacher. He is enrolled in a two-hour graduate music course in improvisation.*

### 3. Effective Teacher Professional Development places teachers within a **supportive community** of learners.

- Music educators' job assignments often isolate them from colleagues. Music teachers need professional development that allows for sharing ideas and expertise, in formal and informal ways. They need multiple opportunities to collaborate with peers and support one other toward mutual goals.
- Communities may be made up of:
  - (a) similarly-experienced or beginning teachers;
  - (b) a cross-section of beginning and experienced teachers,
  - (c) teachers within the same district, county, or region; or
  - (d) area university faculty and music education students.
 A supportive community may also include all teachers in a music teacher's school building(s), administrators, and staff.

### BEGINNING TEACHER EXAMPLES

*Productive curriculum meetings can be extraordinary learning experiences for beginning teachers. Jennifer, a new elementary general music teacher, works on benchmarks for student achievement in monthly meetings with other general music teachers in the school district. These meetings are facilitated by Sally, a senior teacher who has advanced training in curricular mapping and leadership. Twice per semester,*

*Jennifer attends meetings for all district music teachers, which help her understand her role within the district in affecting students' musical development. Several times a year, Jennifer meets with grade-level groups at her elementary school site to find points of intersection between the music curriculum and the year-long plans of the classroom teachers.*

#### EXPERIENCED TEACHER EXAMPLES

Experienced teachers are used to working within a community of teachers and learners. Whether in a graduate class or within a school or school district, these professionals both seek and give support within and outside their subject area to both novice and seasoned colleagues.

*Sally (mentioned above) received district-paid graduate credit for attending a curricular mapping seminar and group leadership training. She also participates in an informal lunch-time book discussion group with other teachers from her school. They are currently reading a book about classroom management.*

*Mark, a veteran elementary chorus teacher, attends a weekly collaborative teacher study group facilitated by a music education faculty member at a local university. The four-person study group is devoted to looking at student work in the form of video from its members' classrooms and rehearsals.*

#### 4. Effective Teacher Professional Development is **voluntary**, featuring elements of **autonomy and choice**.

- Researchers on adult learning have found people are most motivated to internalize new ideas when their need for autonomy and personal freedom is respected.
- Successful music teacher PD allows teachers to participate in various roles (mentor, facilitator, learner, observer) and choose their own delivery medium (for example, online, face-to-face, lectures, small or large group learning groups).
- A simple way to offer choice would be to administer a professional development needs inventory to a group of music teachers at a school/district and use the results as a starting point for designing professional development. While teachers may have difficulty articulating specific PD needs at first, if given a chance to reflect they will identify areas of weakness for which a specific PD offering may help. Options for individualized professional development could still incorporate district initiatives for all teachers.

### BEGINNING TEACHER EXAMPLES

*Peer mentoring is effective for beginning music teachers because both parties are teacher and learner, share similar status, and make a conscious choice to participate in the relationship. Charlie, a beginning elementary band teacher, engages in peer mentoring with Chad, one of his fellow music school graduates. They interact online and on the phone weekly with monthly face-to-face meetings. Charlie acts as both teacher and learner in the relationship: contributing his own knowledge as well as benefiting from Chad's. He is able to personalize her learning because he chooses topics on which to seek guidance most relevant to his teaching situation.*

*Joan, a beginning band director at a large high school, has release time 45 minutes per week to observe Jerry, an experienced band director at another large high school across town. Joan usually has two or three pertinent questions to ask Jerry about his rehearsals and she takes Jerry's ideas directly back to her classroom.*

### EXPERIENCED TEACHER EXAMPLES

**Experienced teachers:** Experienced music teachers, in constructing district- or state-required PD plans, may find alternative ways to increase their knowledge of content and pedagogy that lie outside the typical range of activities in which other teachers may engage. These are teachers who “know themselves” and are often ready to take the lead in knowing what they need.

*Rhonda has been teaching high school choir in the same community for 30 years. She organized a vocal jazz festival, inviting professional, amateur, and student groups from all over the region to perform for one another. The various directors served as clinicians and took turns working with one another's groups. Rhonda said the musical and administrative demands of the festival were great learning experiences.*

*Sandy was interested in learning more about teacher or action research. She had many questions about the nature of student learning in her elementary music classroom, and wanted to create a systematic way to study the achievement of her own students. She got professional development credit from her district for enrolling in a graduate class called “Teacher Inquiry and Research” during which she designed and conducted a study on her students' creative compositions.*

5. Effective Teacher Professional Development provides opportunity for **reflection** in a cycle of innovation, feedback, and reconsideration.

- Researchers have found this cyclical process allows music teachers to be more successful in their efforts to implement new ideas.
- In order for cycles of reflection and feedback to be effective, they must emerge from an atmosphere of trust. Beginning teachers need support from colleagues who share similar professional concerns and who will encourage them in a non-threatening manner.

#### BEGINNING TEACHER EXAMPLES

*Beginning teachers are often in the “self” stage when learning to practice meaningful reflection techniques and can particularly benefit from experienced music teachers modeling their reflective process. Amy spent professional development hours with her mentor Jayme, in a video narration project. First, Jayme narrated a video of her own teaching: the reflection in-action while the lesson is unfolding on film, and the reflection on-action after the lesson was finished. Then Amy worked on her own reflective narration of video.*

#### EXPERIENCED TEACHER EXAMPLES

Experienced teachers need processing time to identify and understand the theories of practice from which they operate; such theories are often not uncovered until teachers delve into reflection upon what do and why they do it.

*Joan is in her eighth year of teaching and is participating in a district-led e-portfolios initiative to encourage continuous reflective thinking. She is journaling online and uploading documents, video, and recordings to document her own learning over the course of a school year, as well as the resulting musical progress of her students. Her partner teacher Julie is engaged in the same process and they help each other in these efforts.*

6. Effective Teacher Professional Development is **sustained**, with ample **site-specific support** for classroom implementation.

- For **all** experience levels, regardless of years of service, professional development must go beyond single conference presentations, or in-service days. PD must be viewed as not an hourly requirement, but rather, a long-term approach to learning that may be a semester, a year, or even a career-long venture.

- Music teachers also need support in translating new concepts and ideas into their unique classroom context. Extended site-specific help—from supervisors, professional development providers, or colleagues engaged in similar efforts to implement change— supports teacher learning in a way that accounts for the variability of music classroom practice.
- All the examples in this document, for both beginning and experienced teachers, are sustained and site-specific.

#### 7. Effective Teacher Professional Development results in **improved musical achievement** for students.

- The ultimate goal of music teacher PD is improved student musical achievement. Due to the complexity of the teaching-learning relationship, researchers have found it difficult to tie specific PD efforts to stronger musicianship in students. However, we know teachers who engage in sustained efforts to improve their teaching will perceive gains in student achievement. Teachers who engage in any of the PD practices suggested above should focus their efforts on musical tasks consistent with the National Standards.

#### BEGINNING TEACHER EXAMPLES

*Beginning teachers will be motivated by PD they can connect to improved student learning. Rick, a beginning choir teacher, needed multiple ideas that could be easily implemented for assessing student learning such as rubrics, rating scales, and portfolios. His state NAfME affiliate sponsored a series of workshops where assessment tools were shared among beginning and expert teachers.*

#### EXPERIENCED TEACHER EXAMPLES

Experienced teachers may be newly inspired by the connection between professional development and students' music achievement.

Experienced teachers are usually at the point in their careers when they feel comfortable in the classroom, and secure in their content knowledge. These teachers often ask, "How can I help my students learn to sing, play and know music better?" The answer is to allow the teachers time and connections to seek out and try best practices.

*Sunnyside School District took a two-pronged approach to PD for their experienced teachers. (1) Release time was provided for partnering with other teachers to pilot systematic teaching approaches that have been*

*successful for others and allow the teachers time for ongoing dialogue on translating theory (research) into practice; (2) Release time was provided for teachers serving on state, regional, and national boards, committees, and curricular initiatives, with the requirement that teachers return and provide PD for other teachers based on this work outside the district.*