



National Association
for Music Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Blueprint for Strengthening the Music Teacher Profession

THE MUSIC TEACHER PROFESSION INITIATIVE

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Acknowledgments

The Blueprint for Strengthening the Music Teacher Profession was developed by the Music Teacher Profession Initiative (MTPI), a task force of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME). The MTPI worked in collaboration with 24 institutions of higher education as well as music education leaders from across the United States to identify (1) factors impacting diversity, recruitment, and retention in the music teacher profession, and (2) mitigation strategies that address these concerns. The MTPI is composed of NAfME members.

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A Blueprint for Strengthening the Music Teacher Profession

Executive Summary

This document is a report of the Music Teacher Profession Initiative's work concerning music teacher educators' perceptions of barriers to and through the profession, as well as mitigations to those barriers. The project was undertaken with the perspective of widening the path to the profession by cultivating and strengthening more inclusive and equitable processes in recruiting, teaching, and nurturing a robust music teacher workforce. This report describes our process, outcomes, and recommendations for action. The report reveals the deeply complex nature of tackling evolution in music teaching and learning. The issues addressed are not easily remedied. We call on educators and administrators who have a vested interest in music teaching and learning to take an active role in moving our culture forward in ways that are inspiring, impactful, and inclusive.

Our work exposes problems and barriers within music teacher education, beginning with the cycle of PK–12 experiences, prospective music educators' entrance into and work within college and university preparation programs, and their transition into music classrooms across the United States. Passionate and meaningful discussions from the perspective of music-teacher-educator faculty provide information about the landscape of current music teacher education curricula and the need to address a changing demographic in the PK–12 classroom, as well as within higher education.

Providing a framework for how music educators can formally address these challenges compelled us to acknowledge serious concerns that the profession has not had the courage or resources to adequately address. The unwitting result of our previous failure to address these concerns has been an indiscriminate continuation of teaching in the manner we were taught for generations. As troubling as that is, it is equally disquieting to know that although the demographics of students in PK–12 classrooms have changed, the demographics of teachers awarded certification to

teach in the schools have not. While we are reliant upon and support the place of importance large ensembles occupy in our curricula, additional and varied musical experiences to address the needs of a shifting community and student population necessitate substantive improvements in our profession, beginning with the path to and through music teacher education.

The MTPI engaged focus groups from a diverse pool of music teacher education programs. Degree programs at these colleges and universities, each with a mission unique to their institution, share the common goal of preparing the next generations of music educators. Anonymity of respondents provided for candid discussions. Discussions regarding experiences *before the degree* focused on PK–12 resources, funding, and curricula, as well as admission and audition procedures. Those focused on experiences *during the degree* provided input on the singularity of music programs, equity and access, credit limitations, Eurocentrism, and funding. Discussions concerning experiences *after degree completion and during the first five years of professional life* related to the resources/funding, quality of life, cultural relevance, relationships, professional development, and recruitment.

Participants provided strategies for mitigating the challenges regarding the identification of diverse candidate pools for music teacher education, preparation of music educators to teach all students, and pedagogies that promote equity in music education. Each priority enables specific stakeholders to better understand the possible paths forward for improving teacher preparation and the resources to support this vision.

Our summary provides significant takeaways, which serve as catalysts for action. The complexities inherent in meeting our challenges naturally led us to identify partners whose positions can assist with advocacy. We outline how we might work with those who can enable comprehensive change in music educator

preparation by ensuring equity, promoting retention, and stimulating growth in the music teacher community. The MTPI recognizes the weight and intricacies of the challenges delineated in this document. Through our work with colleagues across the United States, we present action items that stand as a blueprint for strengthening the future of music education in all its forms, beginning with the music teacher profession.

The following summation outlines the primary points found in the Blueprint document. The summation provides only a succinct snapshot; therefore, the MTPI urges readers to avail themselves of the entire document to gain unabridged context. The full document provides greater detail, with connections to the research literature.

BEFORE THE DEGREE PROGRAM

CHALLENGES

- Inequitable distribution of funding
- Inequitable distribution of human and physical resources
- Participation expenses
- Private instruction expenses
- Access to affordable transportation
- Limited music curricular offerings
- Development of a singular music literacy
- Negative perceptions of the teaching profession
- Marginalized students' feelings of apprehension and mistrust
- Narrowly defined and exclusionary audition requirements
- Cost of audition/application process

MITIGATIONS

- Reduce or remove costs of participation in school music programs
- Develop sustainable philanthropic programs with corporate and community partners
- Partner with local universities and private music instructors to provide affordable access to private instruction
- Create flexible scheduling options
- Provide greater awareness of options to student music and music education at the collegiate level
- Help students prepare for college admission
- Extend recruiting to include younger students, not just high school juniors and seniors
- Provide music offerings that speak to those who may not see themselves in the large-ensemble path
- Mobilize the power of music clubs and organizations (e.g., Tri-M[®] Music Honor Society) to enhance the focus on music and music teaching
- Redesign the process by which students are admitted to music degree program.
- Revise undergraduate music education curricula to ensure a breadth of diversity in developing musicianship and pedagogical skills
- Support recruitment that reaches into elementary and middle schools

DURING THE DEGREE PROGRAM

CHALLENGES

- Emphasis on performance skills
- Lack of alignment between university program content and professional expectations in PK–12 instruction
- Lack of systematic cultural responsiveness in curricular content
- Need to determine role of the institution in reflecting and valuing the community
- Credit limitations that impact student well-being and hamper curricular revision efforts
- Persistent inequities in how students are recruited, auditioned, and enrolled
- Lack of financial support to meet students' needs
- Scholarship limitations
- Turnstile examinations that are often exclusionary for marginalized students
- Faculty laxity in addressing barriers, especially for marginalized students
- Lack of nurturing environment in rigorous, credit-laden program
- Eurocentric curricula
- No apparent systematic review to encourage offerings that may reflect communities served by prospective music educators
- Delivering course content and processes without regard to topics related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access
- Lack of diversity in university faculty
- Budget limitations keep departmental size small and prevent financial assistance to those in need
- Faculty load limits program offerings for students

MITIGATIONS

- Recognize the need for including a wider range of students from diverse backgrounds
- Prioritize cultural competence and relevance by structuring programs to engage with community and culture bearers
- Prioritize what it means to be a well-prepared music teacher today
- Music teacher education curricular revisions must reflect these priorities
- Open dialogue concerning true curricular revision in which all can feel safe in expressing concerns about the preparation of music teacher educators
- Broaden the concept of musicianship skills
- Allow and value multiple forms of pedagogy
- Recognize that institutional differences may be key in identifying places where music teacher education is the primary focus
- Revise music teacher education curricula to reflect a greater perspective that takes into account music and practices of the people of the communities that teachers serve
- Various university faculty, including those outside of music education, should work in tandem to create meaningful changes in music teacher preparation programs to meet the needs of all students
- Preservice teachers will benefit from a cohesive, holistic approach to curriculum

DURING THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE

CHALLENGES

- Low teacher pay relevant to cost of living leading to high turnover rate, especially at schools with few financial resources or who serve marginalized student populations
- Low teacher pay relevant to cost of living leading to leaving the profession altogether
- Professional expenses, including college debt, are a burden for new teachers
- Costs associated with retaining a teaching certificate
- Isolation stemming from being the only or one of only a few music teachers in a building, or from geographical distance from other music educators
- Lack of time leading to difficulty in creating a healthful work-life balance and contributing to feelings of burnout
- Perceived disconnect between personal values and experiences and those of the community they serve
- Feeling undervalued
- Lack of cultural relevance
- Jobs may dissuade or disallow offering novel and innovative music offerings
- Lack of administrative concern, funding, and/or time for meaningful mentoring
- Failure to retain connections with the degree-granting institution
- Professional development is not regularly scheduled and is rarely area-specific
- Preservice teachers leaving degree programs prior to graduation

MITIGATIONS

- Advance lobbying for livable salaries and regular raises by committed colleagues
- Signing bonuses for those who choose to work in schools serving marginalized student populations
- Greater funding opportunities to support novice teachers' professional development
- Regularly scheduled professional development with topics germane to and valued by the novice music educator
- Professional development provided at free or reduced costs
- Purposeful identification of workshop leaders who reflect a plethora of lived experiences, with particular attention to those who are members of marginalized populations
- Greater opportunities for professional development to include live streaming and video presentations at reduced costs
- Purposeful, regular, active engagement with fellow music educators, to include both formal and informal interactions
- Purposeful regular interactions between degree-granting institutions and recent graduates
- Purposeful regular interactions between novice teachers and other members of the community
- Purposeful and meaningful advocacy efforts on behalf of new and novice music educators
- Establishment of support groups specific to their area of expertise
- Institute safe space affinity groups
- Establish a stronger position in valuing a healthful work-life balance
- Actively widen the path to robust music education by developing and offering school musical experiences that reflect the values and lived experiences of various communities
- Partners (e.g., local, community, higher education) take an active role in supporting new and novice teachers
- Experienced music educators must intentionally and demonstrably support their younger, less-experienced colleagues
- Development of sustainable mentoring programs, built into the contracted position to include local and community partners, as well as peers and colleagues
- Development of sustainable mentoring programs administered by state Music Education/Educators Associations (MEAs) and NAFME that include partnerships with discipline-specific organizations

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