TEACHING music

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SPECIAL ISSUE:

STRENGTHENING the Profession, INSPIRING the Next Generation of Music Teachers, TRANSFORMING the Future of Music Education

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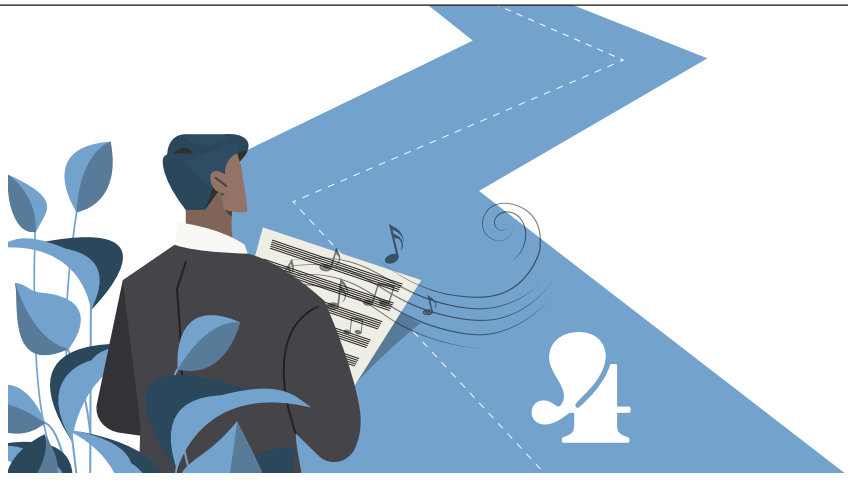
SPECIAL ISSUE:
Strengthening the Profession, Inspiring the Next Generation of Music Teachers, Transforming the Future of Music Education



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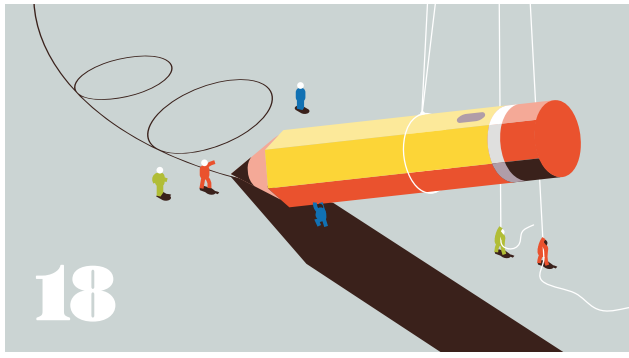

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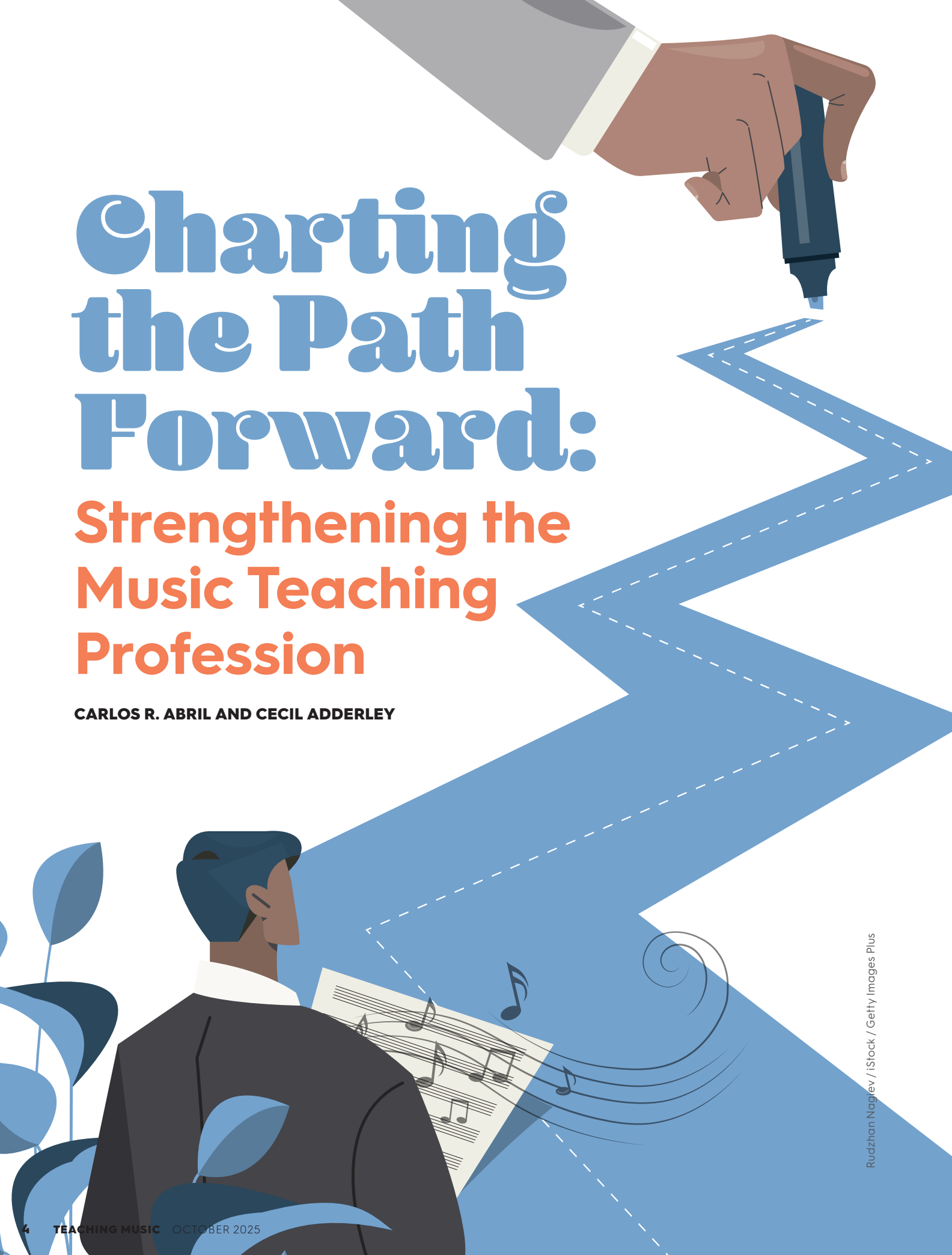
Strengthening the Music Teaching Profession

CARLOS R. ABRIL AND CECIL ADDERLEY



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Across the United States, schools and districts are confronting an increasingly familiar scenario: they need visionary, well-prepared music teachers, yet too few are entering the profession, and too many are leaving it. This special issue of *Teaching Music* responds to that challenge.

Conceived by the Music Teacher Profession Advisory Committee (MTPAC) of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), the issue gathers the voices of teachers, music teacher educators, researchers, and arts leaders to reflect on and re-imagine every phase of the music teacher pipeline—from the first spark of interest in pursuing a career in music education to a professional leading a music program.

The story begins with NAfME envisioning a healthier future for the profession that acknowledges ongoing teacher shortages, persistent inequities, and limited diversity within the current workforce. That mandate gave rise to *A Blueprint for the Music Teaching Profession*, a special report documenting barriers to a music teaching career and inviting actions across the field. Soon after, NAfME convened the MTPAC to translate the *Blueprint*'s vision into concrete, research- and practice-informed solutions.

The MTPAC established four working groups, each focused on a critical juncture in the music teacher pipeline: (1) Recruiting Future Music Educators, (2) Navigating Auditions and Admissions, (3) Preparing Music Teachers, and (4) Supporting Teachers in Schools. Each was tasked with translating research and vision into actions that will strengthen the profession. For more than a year, the committee has met regularly to move beyond diagnosing barriers and to propose actionable strategies. One of the results of this collective effort is a special issue of *Teaching Music* that combines teacher perspectives, research, policy guidance, and a vision to offer ideas for strengthening the teaching profession.

Why Now?

Public discourse around education is increasingly fractious, and many talented student musicians hesitate to enter or remain in a professional field under such scrutiny. At the same time, student populations in our PK–12 schools are more linguistically, culturally, and musically diverse than ever. Yet, many traditional teacher preparation curricula have not kept pace with these shifts. If we want our future music teachers to reach every learner, they must be equipped with the cultural, musical, and pedagogical competencies to reach all learners.

Moreover, early-career music teachers often report feeling isolated or unsupported. The transition from preservice to in-service can be lonely and overwhelming, and without consistent mentoring and professional development, even the most passionate educators may leave the field prematurely. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action, including expanding curricula to incorporate inclusive and innovative pedagogies, rethinking admissions processes, and establishing systems of support for teachers, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

This special issue does not attempt to be encyclopedic. Instead, it offers windows into pressing conversations about recruitment, preparation, support, and retention.

The issue is divided into four sections along the music teacher pipeline:

1. Recruiting Future Music Educators
Section Lead: Wendy Sims

Many children may first imagine a life in music when they encounter an inspirational teacher who values them and models joy in their craft. Two feature articles by Tiger Robison and Wendy Sims offer concrete strategies for harnessing that catalytic moment, from as early as the elementary years to targeted mentorship of promising students in a secondary ensemble. Short pieces by Steve Kelly and Cameron Jenkins broaden the focus to collegiate ambassadors and rural contexts, respectively. As a collective, these articles remind us that targeting potential and recruiting the next generation of music teachers is a responsibility shared by everyone.

2. Navigating Auditions and Admissions
Section Lead: Ann Marie Stanley

For many prospective teachers, the greatest barrier is not a lack of desire but access. Latasha Casterlow-Lalla and Martina Vasil help us recognize how traditional auditions and institutional messages can unintentionally convey the message that "you don't belong." Kelly Parkes and Sarah Nietupski describe ways to prepare inclusive digital portfolios as part

> *If we want our future music teachers to reach every learner, they must be equipped with the cultural, musical, and pedagogical competencies to reach all learners.*

of a holistic assessment for college readiness. Ron Gerhardstein, Joseph Scott, Danielle Davey, and Ed Protzman describe strategies that help students thrive as they transfer from two- to four-year institutions.

3. Preparing Music Teachers
Section Leads: Erin Bailey and Karen Salvador

While classroom demographics, musical tastes, and participation formats have undergone significant changes, most university curricula for music teachers have remained largely unchanged. Rhoda Bernard and Julie Duty explore inclusive peer mentoring models that embed accessibility into music making. Erin Bailey and Shane Colquhoun spotlight teachers forging nontraditional pathways—modern band, music technology, or mariachi—calling for programs to honor diverse ways of making and knowing music. Phil Hash closes this section with a frank discussion of preservice teacher mental health, an often-overlooked dimension of retention and support.

4. Supporting Teachers in the Field
Section Lead: Rob Lyda

Retention often hinges on the earliest years in the field. Drawing on vivid vignettes, Rob Lyda, Scott Sheehan, and Rich Tengowski paint portraits of early career teachers who thrive when anchored by mentorship and systems of care. Josh Palkki details how identity-based networks can combat isolation, while Karen Salvador offers guidance for navigating DEI backlash without abandoning culturally responsive practices.

Interwoven among these four sections are two Jam Sessions that gather NAfME members' insights on (1) curriculum innovations that attract a growing number of students, and (2) the courses that most shaped teachers' development as music educators. Complementing this issue is a concise **Preliminary Research Agenda** that maps high-priority, unanswered questions across every phase of the teacher pipeline. Together, these features invite educators to share their experiences and guide researchers toward impactful lines of inquiry.

How to Read This Issue

We invite you to adopt three overlapping lenses: (1) the reflective practitioner, where you note moments that affirm (or disrupt) your current assumptions, and you consider immediate adjustments you could test in your classroom; (2) the advocate, where you gather evidence and stories that you can share with students, mentees, administrators or other policy makers to help shift a narrative or change a policy; and (3) the collaborator, where you identify pages or ideas that resonate with a colleague, mentor, or student, then discuss, adapt, and co-create new initiatives in your local context.

Looking Ahead

The articles in this magazine are not an endpoint but a call to act. The MTPAC will continue to develop resources, convene symposia or panels, and host webinars to sustain the conversation that leads to change. We invite you to contribute by sharing your stories, piloting new practices, and participating in regional or national gatherings.

As you turn the pages of this issue, consider the curious preservice teacher observing your classroom once per week, or the middle school music student showing leadership potential. Could they find meaning (and a career) in music education? Think, too, of the new colleague attempting to balance work and life, searching for guidance. Could you be the colleague they need right now?

Onward! The future of the music teaching profession depends on each of us.

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OCTOBER 2025 | VOL. 33, NO. 2

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TIGER ROBISON

"I Want to Be You When I Grow Up!"

Elementary Music Teachers' Roles in Recruitment for the Profession

Teaching music in elementary school can be an exercise in reliving the joy and spontaneity of childhood. *Teaching Music* readers of all experience levels likely remember funny stories about children's unpredictability from their elementary practicum or student teaching experiences.

Elementary teaching is coupled with the cognitive challenge of striving to meet all students' needs by making dozens of decisions in every class period, which requires a different skill set and sense of endurance than teaching ensembles. Elementary general music teachers often work with their students from age 5 in kindergarten to age 11 in fifth grade, which is a crucial period for children to construct a sense of self and undergo primary socialization.[1] This longitudinal view of student development can give elementary teachers a rich perspective on emerging artistry, education, and human interactions in general.

Perhaps an underappreciated part of elementary music teachers' skills is their ability to use their long perspective to help children see themselves as lifelong music makers, who may go on to pursue music as a profession. In my role now as a music teacher educator, I understand the tendency of college faculty to visit high schools to recruit new music teachers. However, my 10 years of experience in public elementary school teaching leads me to believe

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the research findings that recruiting music teachers could begin much earlier.[2] Additionally, compulsory elementary general music may be the only music education in a student's public-school experience, so it is in our profession's best interest to include elementary music teachers in the teacher recruitment conversation. This article is about how elementary music teachers can realize the influence they have on young students' futures and how they can contribute to the urgent matter of music teacher recruitment.

Role Models

"Kids are great mirrors" is an adage I have heard in several contexts about role models, first from my father teaching music lessons out of our house, and later in my research.[3] The saying means students tend to reflect some of the attitudes, enthusiasm (or lack thereof), and mannerisms that they receive from their teachers and families. With very young students, there is also a burst of imitative behavior as they build their language skills and construct meaning from context and feelings, even when they cannot articulate exactly what is going on in their lives.

An implication for elementary music teachers in harnessing the power of role models is to strive to be the best version of oneself in the classroom. Being a role model in this context is about being true to yourself in the elementary classroom, celebrating your unique approach, appreciating the autonomy you have at the elementary level, and showing the kind of comfort that comes from a deep sense of purpose in the classroom. Every elementary music classroom is different, but the importance is the same. Few causes could be more noble than serving children.

Elementary teaching can leave you feeling down occasionally, like any other profession, but there are strategies to feel better and remind yourself of your professional purpose. Looking at cards and drawings the children make for you or testimonials from students' families is helpful because they are reminders of the dozens of positive childhood experiences you facilitate each day, sometimes without even knowing it. Understanding the gravity of your positive influence can help you continue to be a special and enthusiastic person in even more children's lives.

An implication for elementary music teachers in harnessing the power of role models is to strive to be the best version of oneself in the classroom.

"If you're excited, they're excited" is another adage about the power of bringing your best self to the classroom. To be clear, being a good role model is not about an overemphasis on appearing happy or following the deeply problematic advice of "you should smile more." All adults show a variety of emotions when they are true to themselves, and children appreciate that. Likewise, all adults can find purpose in their work, and children appreciate that, too.

"I'm Very Musical": Helping Foster a Positive Musical Self-Image in Children

A positive musical self-image in childhood is crucial to maintaining and expanding the pipeline of music participation in schools and, later, the pipeline to recruiting music teachers. Many music teachers can trace back their motivations for entering the field to "being good" at school music at an early age. Elementary music teachers are in an ideal position to instill this message in children, but perhaps more importantly, to expand what being good at music can mean. Making music activates skills in each domain of student learning: the cognitive (understanding), affective (emotional), and psychomotor (mind to body connection). Therefore, there are lots of opportunities for students to receive praise for their diverse efforts and achievements related to music.

Specific and varied praise. Many teachers can attest to the power and utility of specific praise for children, just as many adults can remember specific compliments or the general feeling of positivity they received from some of their teachers in childhood. In tailoring praise to help foster musical self-images, there are several concepts and specific strategies to keep in mind. As a guiding concept, children attach emotions to new knowledge they gain through the encoding process in a part of the brain called the amygdala.

I am not a brain expert, nor do I espouse that all learning needs to be connected to overly happy feelings. However, I do advocate that any music teacher should be aware of the possible emotions students may attach to their teaching and how long those emotions stay with them. For example, I meet many adults my age or older who tend to mentally flinch upon hearing the term "piano lessons" because it conjures up memories of old-fashioned and pedantic teachers instilling an anxiety about playing wrong notes from a book, which I tell them is more of a notation experience than a musical experience. Unfortunately, those adults are usually quick to tell me that they are "not very musical" or that they "don't have musical training," when that is far from the truth.

In listening to self-described non-musical adults' accounts, I hear missed opportunities from past music teachers, who could have praised these adults long ago with prompts in the cognitive, affective, or psychomotor domains. This reminds me of all the ways to praise a child's musical understanding and perception, which can help them see themselves as musical or good at music. I gravitate toward compliments that span more than one

TEACHER FEATURE:

Estela Torres Guernsey

"I was a part of a book study during my first year of teaching, and the author mentioned using intentional language, specifically referring to students as 'readers' so they would begin to identify as readers themselves. This small shift in using language more intentionally was something I tried to implement right away in my classroom, referring to all of my students as 'musicians.' I truly want every child in my classroom to think of themselves as a musician through the many, diverse ways we engage with music over time. Speaking that into existence—that they are musicians simply when they come in the door—is the first step to them identifying their innate musical abilities; music is for humans!"

ESTELA TORRES GUERNSEY
Campbell County School District #1, Gillette, Wyoming
Northwest Representative, NAfME General Music Council

domain, usually when students are making music and can oversee their own musical decisions.

For example, at a xylophone with bars removed to avoid dissonance and with a little coaching, I find most students can contribute an improvisation that makes musical sense within a selected musical context, be it a West African drumming recording, an Orff ensemble arrangement played by their classmates, a popular music cover song, or a singing game, for instance. Importantly, I find it best to start one's compliment with the word "You" to celebrate the student and not "I" which can give the impression that the student was performing solely for your approval. For example, "You started and ended with similar ideas; nice choice!" is stronger than "I like how you started and ended with similar ideas."

Praise and encouragement in single domains can also be effective, even very simple compliments based on observable behavior. "You were concentrating really hard during the quiet part; way to focus" is one way to recognize a student's effort. An even more concrete observation turned compliment is "You moved your mallets to the last note during the rest; way to plan ahead." A frequent compliment I share with my students is my father's term "artist face," which he used to describe when a student was immersed in a musical groove to the point that their eyes glazed over and their lower lip relaxed to reveal their slightly opened mouth. Later in my education, I recognized this face as symptomatic of a flow state,[4] which is exciting for children to experience, just as it is for professional musicians. "You had artist face that time; good work!" remains a high compliment in our classroom, and I encourage any variation of it in your classroom.

Get yourself out of their play as soon as possible. New teachers may be very wary of ceding control and musical decision making to their young students, but doing so is essential to those students' development as music makers. Now as a father of an elementary-aged daughter, I see the same is true when we host my daughter's friends for an afternoon. At first, my instinct was to interrupt them with all sorts of my own ideas about what to play around the house. Later, I recognized the wisdom in providing spaces and supplies to facilitate their play (e.g., a soft ball, blank paper, tape), setting a few ground rules, and then remaining in the house but at a distance. Now their play is far more imaginative, independent, and more meaningful to them than when I was projecting my ideas about play onto them.

The same wisdom is true in the elementary music classroom. In general music, much of our curriculum comes from a varied repertoire of songs, rhymes, and musical games based on folk traditions. Most folk traditions celebrate variation, addition, and abstraction in performing those songs within reason (i.e., honoring the tradition from which the song came). For example, in playing and performing Jill Trinka's rendition of "Jubilee" in class, it can be deeply rewarding to ask small groups of students to create their own verses with similar melodic contours (a beautiful pentatonic tone set) as the original, but with different lyrics, melodic embellishments, and corresponding motions. Likewise, some students can best express themselves in that piece while contributing a body percussion ostinato.

In ensemble settings, where musical decisions can be more dictated by the score, there is still room to give students agency and remove oneself from their play. Giving specific students the choice to try three different tempi (fast, medium, slow) for a section of a piece is a start. Asking other students to answer imaginative questions like, "What imagery should we all be thinking about in this slow section" is another

way to help children contribute original thoughts to the group and see themselves as music makers.

Positive phone calls home. "Calling home" is a phrase that can conjure up fear and shame in a student (or caretaker), but it does not always have to be that way. I have written about this strategy before,[5] but it is worth repeating in this context because of its role in maintaining the music participation pipeline. Calling home to report an act of compliance is fine (e.g., a student put away materials quickly), but it does not celebrate the breakthroughs students can have, specifically in a music class. The most effective calls home are when you can report a student's musical decision making and describe it distinctly.

Early in my public-school teaching career, I remember setting up three-person stations for fourth-grade students to improvise their ostinati together within specified guidelines. A student, Carley (pseudonym), had an aural image of an ostinato that showed a lot of sophistication and made use of complementary rhythms. She effectively communicated it to her partners, and they performed it with great satisfaction. I called Carley's mother on my lunch break and described this to her just as I have written here, and in the two minutes that it took to complete that call, Carley gained a powerful memory that she had good musical ideas, which was reinforced by her family. According to her mother, that memory played a small role in Carley's decision eventually to join and remain in the band program. I advocate for positive phone calls home, even though I am aware there are other communication mechanisms available, such as messaging apps, simply because I believe there is still something very personal about taking the time to call and converse (or leave a heartfelt voicemail message).

> ***I find it best to start one's compliment with the word "You" to celebrate the student and not "I" which can give the impression that the student was performing solely for your approval.***

Future Career Events

Teaching Music readers may remember events from childhood when an adult came to their classroom to share highlights about their profession, sometimes in stand-alone career days or as short supplements to special events. For example, police officers and firefighters often have organized outreach efforts in the elementary schools for public health and safety reasons as part of their mission. Similarly, we music teachers can take outreach efforts just as seriously, but for music participation and later professional recruitment reasons.

Many secondary ensemble teachers make a habit of performing for elementary school audiences and building a pipeline with their feeder programs (a sometimes-troublesome term), which is a great start. However, elementary music teachers can help facilitate a more meaningful interaction by inviting ensemble directors to talk about what it is like to be a music teacher and answer questions from elementary students, even for 10 minutes after a performance. As described earlier in this article about role models, children are very perceptive, and they can tell when someone is excited about what they do. By inviting other professional music educators to your classroom, you can provide a diversity of perspectives and role models beyond yourself, thereby increasing the chances that a music professional will resonate with your students.

Concluding Thoughts

Elementary music teachers are in an ideal position to help children have a positive musical self-image, and that image is where meaningful music participation and later professional recruitment starts. I am grateful that there is space in this special issue of *Teaching Music* to draw attention to elementary music teachers' often-overlooked roles in future music participation and career decisions. Elementary music teachers' subtle but important contributions can help solidify the future of music education.

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WENDY L. SIMS

Teachers Recruiting Teachers: Identifying and Encouraging Future Music Educators

If I learned anything from my time in high school and middle school band, it's that your students will look at you like you hung the stars (unless given reason to not). So, hang the stars with them and let them shoot for the moon.

Maggie H, senior music education major

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Music teachers are invested daily in helping their students learn, grow, and thrive. We need to be sure we are putting that same care and energy into helping our profession grow and thrive, too, ensuring that there will be enough teachers entering the field to continue providing children with high quality music education experiences in their schools. In many communities and school districts, this may even be a matter of school music program survival, because of the music teacher shortage that has been growing and spreading across the U.S. since the 1980s.[1] This shortage is particularly acute for small and rural schools (see the article in this issue by Cameron Jenkins) and may be exacerbated when school music students don't see music teacher role models who look like them, given 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."[2]

School music teachers are among the most important influencers in identifying and recruiting future music teachers, according to articles and research studies dating back to 1949 (see Reference List)! I will focus here on secondary school teachers, but elementary school teachers also can play an important role in planting seeds to promote the music teaching profession (see the article in this issue by Tiger Robison), and college music education majors also can assist with inspiring younger students to follow their lead (see the article in this issue by Steven Kelly).

In addition to considering this topic through discussions and deliberations as a member of NAfME's Music Teacher Professional Advisory Committee, I was inspired by interactions with a high school senior during a college visit to my university campus last fall. Ava O described how she had been systematically nurtured by her high school orchestra teacher (Mrs. B) who recognized Ava's potential as a future music educator. She recalled that, "As soon as she found out I wanted to be an orchestra teacher partway through my freshman year, Mrs. B began offering me opportunities to be a leader."

Ava recounted that Mrs. B heard her lamenting that an impactful elementary honors orchestra in which she had participated was no longer offered and explained how Mrs. B took her under her wing, helping Ava plan and initiate an after-school elementary orchestra program that began the next year: "She worked with me on all the parts of running such an orchestra, from asking for permission to use rehearsal space to inviting parents to an open house on the last day of rehearsal." Mrs. B spent many hours, including her planning block, treating Ava "like a student teacher," discussing teaching strategies, helping her write lesson plans, providing feedback, and turning more of the instruction over to Ava.

I reached out to Mrs. B to learn more about how she nurtured future music educators, and she explained, "Talking to them about the decisions I make in my own teaching and why I choose to make them is always present. I also try to include students in choices of both repertoire and assessments."

> ***The future of our profession may be at stake if teachers at all levels don't take a proactive stance and view it as their responsibility to identify and nurture the future generations of music educators.***

Other strategies she identified include opportunities to teach in after-school elementary strings classes and to work with elementary and middle school ensembles in the district's summer program; having interested students take an extra orchestra class, first as a performer, and then giving them the chance to conduct; encouraging them to learn and play another string instrument in orchestra; providing pedagogical materials for them to read; and giving them the "inside scoop" on all of the logistics behind the work music educators do.

She also reaches out to their parents to "discuss the successful things that the students have done and help them to find colleges that are the right fit for them." These strategies are consistent with those described in a survey completed by high school music teachers who had a record of successfully mentoring future music education majors.[3]

When asked what qualities she looked for in potential music educators, Mrs. B identified characteristics that, again, are consistent with those reported in the research literature.[4] These include a love of music and in-school music experiences, a desire to help others, gravitating toward leadership roles such drum major, leading a chamber group, running sectionals, and showing an interest in conducting. She explained:

> I look for students who take initiative to pursue their interests. When I see potential in someone, I try to offer leadership opportunities so that each person can get the chance to try their hand at something new. Once they have one success, I encourage them to take more responsibility. It usually just naturally evolves from there.

According to Ava, it actually was being a student in Mrs. B's honors elementary orchestra that set her on the path toward music teaching by about fifth grade:

> I was inspired by Mrs. B, who always made orchestra class fun. She took us on field trips to the Missouri Music Educators Association conference and to nursing homes as part of her honors orchestra group. This group had a major impact on me; without it, I question if I would still be playing at all.

I wish there was a way for me to express my gratitude for every music educator everywhere. They do so much and create such welcoming environments for everyone. They have more influence than they might ever get to know.

Olivia D, high school junior, future music education major

Current music teachers can use many strategies to help influence young people to pursue music education as a career. Here is a list of action items, based on the research literature, the story of Ava and Mrs. B, as well as thoughts and ideas collected from several current and future collegiate music education majors:

1. Don't hesitate to initiate and discuss the topic of a career as a music teacher in all classes, and especially with those students whom you believe have the musical skills and temperament to successfully pursue music education. High school student Olivia D explained, "I think that my teachers had a huge impact on my decision. Once I really knew how they felt about my presence in class, the decision to pursue a music education degree was easy."
2. Convey to your students that you see and appreciate their hard work. Ava L (senior music education major) received a note from her teacher while in high school that she describes as "ground-shaking," and that still has a place of honor on her wall. The teacher wrote that she noticed and admired Ava's contributions to their band program. According to Ava, "It is nice to hear positive feedback like that from an adult you idolize; the recognition of students and the work they put in goes a long way toward encouraging them to see themselves in this profession."
3. Private teachers have been found to have an important influence on career decisions. Take every opportunity to engage with studio music teachers in the community and help them understand that they are valuable partners in recruiting future school music teachers—for example, have your students make hand-written invitations to their school concerts to present to their private teachers. According to sophomore music education major Ethan H:

   > When I was a senior in high school, I wanted to do something in music, but I had no idea what I wanted to do. So, during my private lesson, I voiced my concerns with my teacher. He went over the benefits of teaching and how teaching can be a great experience. He would often tell me about what had happened while he was out teaching middle school. It sounds simple, but that's the reason I chose music education. I want to teach and inspire the same way I was inspired.

4. Encourage all music students, and especially future music teachers, to become well-rounded musicians. Provide suggestions for engaging in music opportunities that broaden their skills and experiences. In school, this might be performing with different ensembles or participating in Tri-M. Out-of-school experiences might include song-leading at camp or youth group, participating in community programs, and so forth. If they play in a garage/basement band or compose or arrange for themselves and their peers, provide an opportunity for them to perform for the class or on a school concert. "Encourage the students to audition for any opportunities that come along" is a suggestion provided by Ava L. Researchers have found that the opportunity to conduct can have a positive impact on secondary students' decisions to become a music educator.[5]
5. Help students develop the ability to perform on other instruments, perhaps in a second band or orchestra. Aspiring music educator Ava O described how she made time to do this: "I stacked my senior year full of music classes by taking as much as possible over the summer." Students could work with a peer to teach each other how to play their instruments. Those who have not played the piano can be encouraged to "mess around" at the keyboard to practice reading both clefs and playing multiple lines simultaneously. Jonah L (junior music education major) was especially appreciative that his school music teacher "started giving me free piano lessons before class to help prepare me for college."
6. Be sure that all students can visualize themselves as music educators. Help students who may differ from the teachers they see in their school with respect to gender, race/ethnicity, heritage, age, ability/disability, and so forth, to picture themselves in that role, too. Identify diverse music teachers via personal contacts, social media, or YouTube and share their photos in your classroom, create and post a video playlist, and/or connect via in-person or Zoom visits.
7. Assist students with the college music audition process by helping them prepare for the audition. Jonah L described how meaningful it was to him when his teacher not only helped him prepare for his audition but even came to the audition with him to provide support.
8. Communicate with other school music teachers to compare notes on students who show promise or interest in becoming future music teachers. According to Ava L, she was influenced to become a music educator because her band director discussed her future in music education with her throughout high school.
9. Engage parents in conversations about their child's potential, and help them understand the personal, professional, and even monetary rewards of being a music teacher. They may not know, for example, about

supplemental pay available for outside-the-classroom activities such as marching band, show choir, or directing the school musical. Assist them in identifying college programs and explain the process of auditions and music scholarships, which differ from the typical college admissions process. Jonah L explained that this was invaluable because "My family has always supported me, but they knew absolutely nothing about music."

10. When hosting student teachers and field experience students in your classroom, explain to them their importance as role models and as future music teacher recruiters. As Maggie H recounted:

> In 10th grade, I had a really amazing student teacher. She was super involved in the band from the very beginning and got to know all the students really well. That year at our band banquet, she came up to me and told me she had just come from a Women's Brass Conference. She then said that she watched a euphonium soloist while there, and told me, "All I could think while she was playing was 'that's gonna be Maggie one day.'" And those words stuck with me ever since.

11. Provide resources and suggestions for the students to do some research and reading about music pedagogy for their instrument and music education more broadly. Share accessible NAfME resources such as *Teaching Music* magazine.

12. Become better informed about effective recruiting strategies. This could be a topic discussed in music department faculty meetings. Check out the TeachMusic Coalition website for resources and talking points addressed to teachers, students, parents, and school counselors *(www.teachmusic.org/teacher-resources)*. Consider attending professional development sessions about this issue and even offering to present about this to music educators.[6]

13. Overtly model and discuss the joy of making music, and how the opportunity to share music and connect with others through music is a rewarding career path. Ava L described how her music teacher "truly opened my eyes to finding ways to connect and uplift your students, because the world always needs more empathy and compassion, and that in itself is the greatest form of education to me."

Over and over again, research and anecdotal evidence points to the importance and influence of music teachers on young people's decisions to become music educators themselves. The future of our profession, including the opportunity for children in every community to learn music in school from qualified teachers, may be at stake if teachers at all levels don't take a proactive stance and view it as their responsibility to identify and nurture the future generations of music educators.

Mrs. B and Ava O

WENDY SIMS is Professor of Music Education and Director of Undergraduate/Graduate Studies in Music Education at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri, and Past Chair of NAfME's Society for Research in Music Education.

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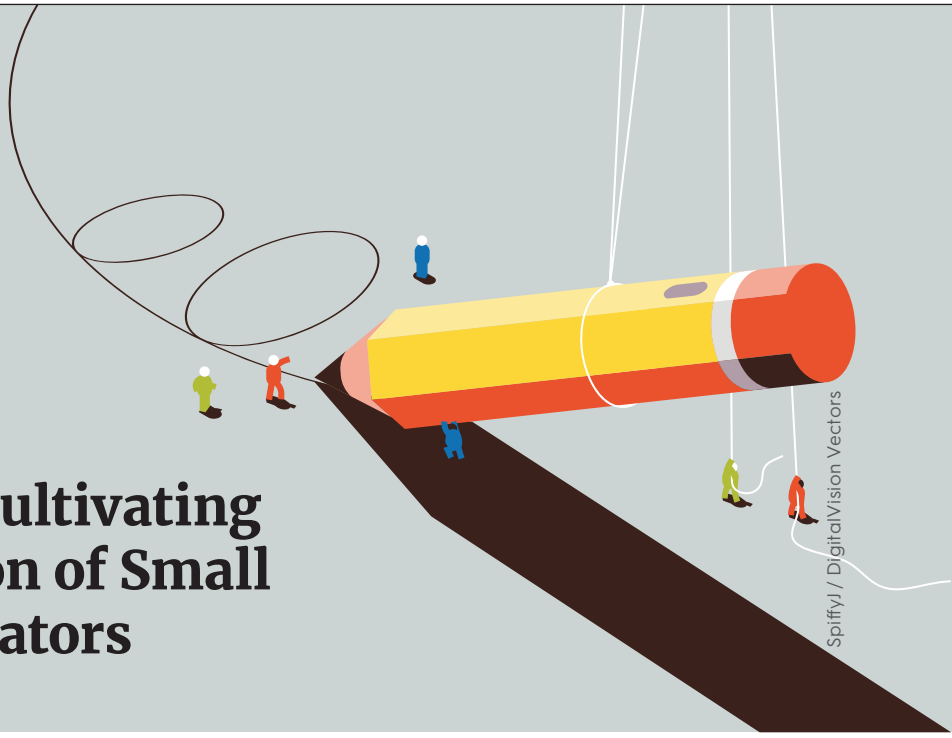
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For an extensive list of resources on this topic, scan this QR code, or visit https://bit.ly/NAfMEMusicEdMentor.

CAMERON W. JENKINS

The Perfect FIT:

A Framework for Cultivating the Next Generation of Small School Music Educators



The next generation of music educators is here. They are already seated in music classes and ensembles across the country, developing a passion for music. Many are on the verge of catching the spark that turns a student into a future music educator. As today's teachers, we hold the baton in shaping their journey. Small schools play a significant role in this effort as they overcome distinct challenges such as limited resources, broader teaching loads, and fewer staff. Music educators in small schools also offer unique opportunities to fill the pipeline into our profession. In small schools, students often take on greater responsibility, allowing their leadership skills and creative edge to sharpen. These settings can be the very place where a student's potential interest as a future music educator is initiated.

To support this, I developed the FIT Framework, a simple model to intentionally recruit and inspire students to pursue a music education career in small school settings. FIT stands for Find teacher-building moments, Invite more collaboration, and Talk about next steps.

Find Teacher-Building Moments

Throughout the school year, there are countless opportunities to nurture the educator within each student. From peer tutoring and student leadership to assisting with rehearsals, literature selection, and stage setup, students can experience aspects of teaching in authentic ways. These opportunities are especially impactful in smaller programs where student initiative is essential to success.

One of my former students, Brian, began helping struggling middle school band members after school once a week. What started as simple guidance turned into a student leadership incubator. Brian eventually joined the high school leadership team and he recently completed his music education degree at a nearby university. He credits those teacher-building moments as what first made him feel like a leader. When we're intentional, we can help students discover that teaching isn't just something adults do. In fact, it's something they're already living out.

Invite More Collaboration

Connection fuels inspiration. Collaboration between large and small programs, urban and suburban districts, and two- and four-year institutions opens doors for students to imagine themselves in the field. What might happen if advanced students mentored beginners? If local universities invited high schoolers to observe or engage in collaborative experiences? If community college faculty partnered with high school directors to host teaching clinics?

In one initiative, we invited alumni teaching in rural districts to lead virtual Q&A sessions with student leaders. Their firsthand accounts about the joys and challenges of teaching in smaller schools gave students a realistic and encouraging glimpse into the profession. These kinds of collaborations help students see music education not as an abstract idea but as a community they can join with a vibrant network of educators who care deeply about the next generation of learners and leaders.

Talk About Next Steps

Educators in small schools are uniquely positioned to cast vision for their students. Elementary and middle school teachers can encourage students to continue their musical journey through high school. High school educators can highlight leadership opportunities and outline the path toward becoming a teacher. College and

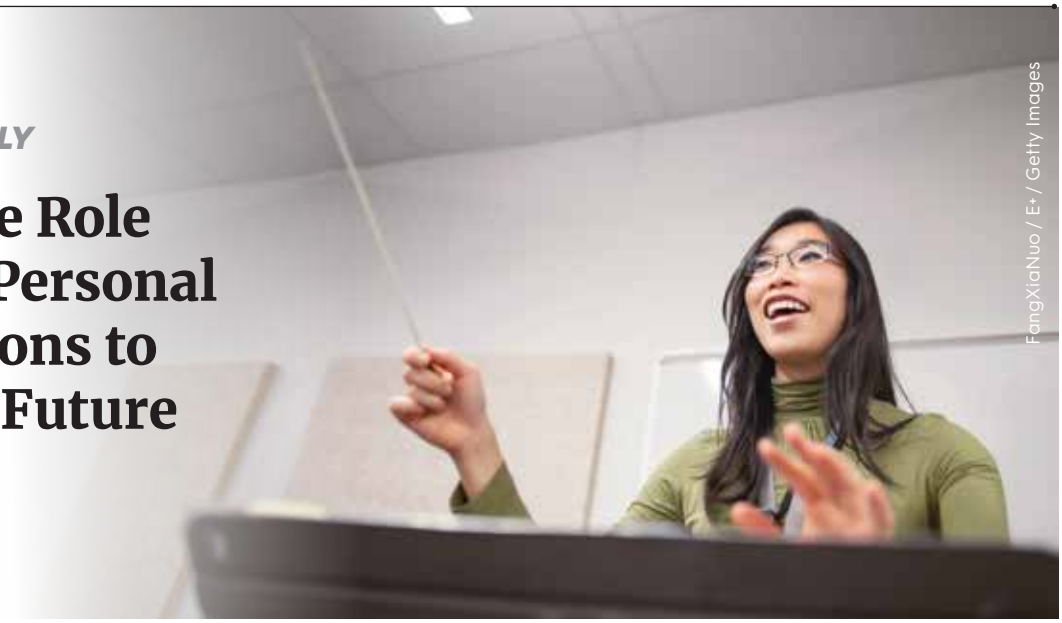
Connection fuels inspiration. Collaboration between large and small programs, urban and suburban districts, and two- and four-year institutions opens doors for students to imagine themselves in the field.

community music leaders can help students view music education, especially teaching in small school settings, as a rewarding and vital calling.

I once asked a junior, "Have you ever thought about teaching music?" That single question opened a floodgate of curiosity. We walked through college options, scholarships, and what it would take. She later shared that the question made her dream out loud in a way she'd never experienced in school. These conversations don't have to be formal. They unfold over time, through trust and encouragement. When we plant these seeds early and often, we help students envision small-school teaching not as a fallback plan but as a future full of purpose and influence.

Music educators in every setting have the power to inspire the next generation to both perform and teach music. These conversations don't have to happen all at once. They grow through shared experiences, relationships, and intentional moments. By being mindful and proactive with the FIT Framework, we can help students recognize the unique opportunity and impact they can have by teaching in a small school where their leadership, creativity, and passion can shape not just a program but an entire community.

CAMERON W. JENKINS is the founder of Full Potential Leadership, an international communications platform that coaches innovative leaders and their teams to reach their full potential. He serves as an Assistant Professor of Music at William Carey University in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.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STEVEN N. KELLY

Collegiate Role Models' Personal Connections to Promote Future Teachers

It is no surprise that our country is experiencing a shortage of individuals willing to teach music. What may come as a surprise is that the teacher shortage has been ongoing for almost 30 years.[1] Discussions addressing the shortage and ways to help alleviate it have been ongoing and are unique to different phases from pre-collegiate experiences to college education, then into the initial years of teaching.[2] Personal experience has shown to be effective in helping students think about teaching.

In a study published in the *Journal of Research in Music Education*, Tiger Robison and colleagues suggested that students may feel more compelled to consider teaching when they encounter positive role models.[3] One group of role models is preservice collegiate students. Preservice music educators are full of infectious energy and optimism, which can motivate students to consider teaching as a career. These personal interactions can happen by having collegiate music educators return to their former K–12 schools when they are on breaks.

Personal interactions can be creative, unique to every situation, and advantageous for everyone. One approach is for the collegiate student to take on the role of a teacher. Students may wish to volunteer to help their former K–12 teacher with private lessons, sectional rehearsals, organization, music selection, auditions, arranging, and planning. Through these activities, the K–12 students can personally see a developing teacher in action. Not only do the K–12 students experience the collegiate as a teacher, but the collegiate gains valuable hands-on teaching experience helping to develop their sense of identity.

Performance is another way to promote music education. Seeing future teachers in the role of both musicians and teachers demonstrates the full scope of being a teacher. Returning to a former school and performing with the ensembles, performing a solo, or in a small ensemble, even conducting in a concert are terrific ways to let students personally see that music is the essence of what music teachers are about.

Having collegiate music educators talk about their experiences as a teacher and with the profession to all students is also effective. Presentations can be made for Tri-M chapters, booster organizations, and classes and rehearsals. Again, students see a collegiate who is excited about becoming a teacher and hear the experiences they are having and activities they are involved in as they prepare to become teachers. Younger musicians can discuss all the possibilities, ask questions, and explore the teaching process. It's a win-win task because the collegiate can also work on giving verbal presentations and feeling comfortable presenting to students.

Researchers have long noted that students often join school music programs because of their personal connection with music teachers who have visited them in their classes. The same approach can help connect K–12 students to the music teacher profession through personal interactions with collegiates who are role models of developing future teachers. This connection can promote teaching as a profession and help alleviate the music teacher shortage, while the benefits are shared by all.

STEVEN N. KELLY is Professor of Music Education in the College of Music at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida, and is the Co-Chair of NAfME's Collegiate Advisory Council.

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How are you expanding your music curriculum to engage and attract more students?

SHAWNA LONGO

Supervisor of Visual and Performing Arts and Consumer Education

Westfield Public Schools, Westfield, New Jersey

Developing a middle school music technology program over the span of nine years reinforced for me that we need to meet our students where they are if we want to give them a positive experience and lifelong appreciation for music education. It also afforded me the opportunity to continually evolve as a teacher through the lessons that I developed.

Quincy Jones said, "I've always thought that a big part of my success was that I was always listening." As a visual and performing arts supervisor, I need to listen to my teachers, the students, and the community. After a year of listening and evaluating our existing programming, I added a fourth option, starting in the sixth grade, called Modern Music to better meet the needs of our students. I hope to continue to evolve and expand it as a course offering for our high school students over the next few years.

RAMON RIVERA

Mariachi and Folklorico Teacher

Mount Vernon High School, Mount Vernon, Washington

In our Mariachi program, we are expanding our music curriculum by incorporating culturally relevant teaching practices and creating more performance opportunities for Mariachi and Folklorico students. This includes introducing Mariachi and Folklorico at earlier grade levels, offering beginner through advanced classes, and inviting local Mariachi and Folklorico professionals for workshops and to serve as mentors to my students. We're also collaborating with families and the community to build support and pride around the tradition. It takes a village approach. These efforts aim to make Mariachi and Folklorico more accessible and engaging while honoring their cultural roots and musical richness.

MICHAEL RAIBER

Director of Fine Arts

Mustang Public Schools, Mustang, Oklahoma

NAfME *Teaching Music* Advisory Committee Member

Our vision is that every student in Mustang be meaningfully engaged in the arts. To accomplish this vision, we need to offer courses that are engaging for students who may not choose to be part of our more historically typical courses. Our modest start includes the addition of three new courses. We have added a Lyric/Song Writing course and have gotten it approved for English language arts credit. We have added a History of Rock and Roll course and have gotten it approved for history credit. Finally, we are adding a Rock Guitar course that we plan to grow into a modern band approach that will eventually expand into a full contemporary music production curriculum. Much of this work is in response not only to the need to diversify our offerings but also to the revocation of our fine arts graduation requirement and the focus on workforce development in high school. Expanding credit offerings outside of the fine arts will help.

MICHAEL D. STONE

Coordinator, Visual and Performing Arts Department

Bakersfield City School District, Bakersfield, California

NAfME Western Division President

NAfME Professional Learning and Programming Committee (PLPC) Co-Chair

The passage of Proposition 28 in California in 2022 has provided unprecedented funding for arts education in the schools, with the caveat that all expenditures must expand student access and cannot supplant existing spending. In our district, we already had strong band, orchestra, and choir (BOC) programs in the schools. We looked strategically at new opportunities for using this new, permanent funding stream, of which 80% must be used to hire faculty and staff. Our result was a new job description called Arts Innovations Teacher. The vision in our Strategic Arts Plan was to identify parts of the current arts education curriculum that could be expanded upon, bringing student agency and buy-in to our course of study. We determined that we wanted Mariachi, Folklorico, Modern Band, and Guitar.

As a result, in the fall of 2023, the Bakersfield City School District hired its first Arts Innovations Teacher – Modern Band. This new program targeted students not participating in our existing offerings. The Modern Band classes provided student access to popular music, bringing relevance to the students' lives. A year later, positions in Folklorico and Mariachi were added. Our students are loving the programs! We have hired outstanding teachers who have passion in these new areas of the curriculum. Long term, we are poised to continue to innovate as we work to meet the interests of more students.

AMY LUI

Instrumental Music, Music Technology and Industry Studies Instructor

John H. Francis Polytechnic High School (LAUSD) in Sun Valley, California

NAfME Music Composition Council Western Division Representative

Recently, I had the pleasure of connecting with Richard Batiste, the son of a colleague and a 2018 graduate of John H. Francis Polytechnic High School where I teach in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. During his freshman year, Richard played in the front ensemble of our school's marching band. However, despite his deep love for music, he chose not to continue with music classes. Still, Richard has remained deeply connected to music in his everyday life, whether through exploring global genres, listening to game soundtracks, or enjoying music in the background throughout his day. He even comes from a family of accomplished musicians. His cousin is seven-time Grammy Award-winning pianist, singer, composer, and bandleader Jon Batiste. And yet, despite this legacy, Richard does not see himself on a stage or composing music. What truly lit him up was listening to songs his friends had written and offering thoughtful, encouraging feedback while thinking of ways the music can be explored, applied, and shared within their local community and beyond. His passion was undeniable, but the traditional performance path simply did not reflect the role he wanted music to play in his life.

That conversation crystallized something I had been observing for years in my own classroom. Students like Richard are not the exception, they are the majority. Each year, I survey my students. More than 96% report that they had never learned to play an instrument, sung in a group, or taken a music class before enrolling in my program. More than 75% did not enroll in music until their senior year, sometimes as late as six months before graduation. When I asked if this was because their other schools did not offer music as a class, most of them said their previous schools *did* offer music. I realized that the issue was not access, it was relevance. They did not see themselves, their cultures, or their musical tastes reflected in our standard offerings.

In response to this disconnect, I began expanding our curriculum to include Music Technology and Industry Studies. This shift has completely transformed the way students engage with music on our campus. Our program now includes hands-on learning with digital audio production, songwriting and beat-making, live sound and stage management, and the business of music. We still teach instruments like piano, guitar, and drums, but as part of a broader, more inclusive experience. Interestingly, after learning the basics, many students go on to join our band or orchestra. We also explore diverse musical genres, teach industry-standard software, and connect students with professionals working in fields such as audio engineering, music supervision, licensing and sync, publishing and copyright, royalties, performance rights, entertainment law, booking, promotion, and artist management. Whether students are considering a career in music or simply want to better understand the entertainment culture they consume and that constantly markets to them, they leave the program empowered with knowledge, skills, and a clearer sense of the possibilities ahead. This broader approach not only demystifies the industry, it empowers students to see new possibilities for themselves in music, regardless of whether they sing or play an instrument.

In a time when a growing number of young people are choosing not to attend college, high school may be the last opportunity for our students to be introduced to these topics and to potentially be inspired to continue

on the pathway of being music professionals or to develop a deeper connection and appreciation with music. Even here in Los Angeles, one of the music capitals of the world, students can still feel excluded from music education when the curriculum centers only on Eurocentric traditions or performance ensembles. When we broaden our definition of what it means to study music, we open the door for students like Richard—and thousands of others like him—to find a meaningful place in the world of music.

BRIAN BEGGS
Music Teacher
Davidson Middle School,
San Rafael, California
NAfME *Teaching Music* Advisory Committee Member

Expanding the music curriculum to engage more students is imperative to the success of music programs in the future. At the middle school where I teach, there has long been a thriving band, choir, and orchestra program. For decades, the school has also uniquely offered a steel pans class (sometimes even two sections). This last school year, the school decided to keep all of those performing classes and add a Mariachi class, and multiple sections of Exploring Music, which is a participatory, activity-based music class where kids learn to play ukulele and piano and how to use music technology, but they do not perform concerts. The traditional ensembles, including their steel pans classes, are flourishing with very high student enrollment, and the Mariachi and Exploring Music classes have added about 150 more students to our music program.

Expanding your music curriculum to meet the needs of all students at your school can be a great way to get more kids into music, offer flexibility for the teacher to create classes unique to their community interests, and help make a music program more culturally relevant to your students. Go for it!

ARGINE SAFARI
Director of Choirs
Pascack Valley High School,
Hillsdale, New Jersey
NAfME *Teaching Music* Advisory Committee Member

In our district, we have been expanding and evolving the music curriculum by embracing student voice. We actively survey both students and parents to gather input on desired course offerings, and their feedback has played a central role in shaping the curricular direction of our program.

In response, we've introduced courses such as Modern Rock Band, Keyboard, and Music Technology—all designed to reach students who may not be enrolled in traditional band or choir but have a strong interest in music. These courses offer new entry points for creative exploration and skill-building, helping us connect with a broader population of students.

This year, I had the opportunity to lead the development of a new Honors Music course, which is being piloted in 2025–2026. This option was created to support academically driven students who previously felt they had to choose between an honors course and music. By giving them a rigorous and recognized pathway within our ensembles, we're helping more students stay engaged in music while meeting their academic goals.

As part of our current five-year curriculum evaluation cycle, we're continuing to reflect, review, and reimagine our offerings to better serve student interests and learning goals. Additionally, we've placed a strong focus on outreach—maintaining consistent, targeted visits to our middle schools to promote our high school music programs. Based on feedback from students who joined us in ninth grade, these efforts are making a difference.

Ultimately, we believe that a responsive, inclusive, and student-driven curriculum is key to sustaining a vibrant and growing music program.

DAVID KAUFFMAN
Senior Manager of Apex Arts Magnet Program
Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Maryland

Expansion of the music curriculum is something that typically generates spirited debate. The most common fear is that expansion of offerings will most definitively reduce interest or enrollment in existing, more traditional music offerings. *This isn't a zero-sum game.* How we facilitate academic engagement with music hasn't really caught up with how society's interaction with music has evolved. The result has been elective programs in many schools that have less than the minimum instrumentation/voicing needed to provide authentic intersections with traditional academic ensemble offerings.

During the past five years, the Apex Arts Magnet Program in Anne Arundel County has prioritized the growth and development of a Commercial Music

offering to augment the program's existing traditional band, orchestra, vocal, piano, percussion, and guitar offerings. Creating instructional and authentic performance opportunities in popular music has allowed students who were not previously participating in traditional school-based performance ensembles to engage differently with music making. The addition of the Apex Commercial Band, Apex Rising Stars, and Electro-Rock Orchestra have increased the ensemble offerings and helped to broaden how we define musical literacy within the program while not detracting from our program's more traditional offerings.

Additionally, the teachers in the program regularly facilitate performance experiences with professionals that help to elevate their music industry connections. One concert featured students from the Electro-Rock Orchestra alongside regional professional musicians performing a night of video game music at a local college. Other collaborations have included side-by-side performances with area orchestras and another the creation of an annual performance of popular music in one of Annapolis's most storied performance venues. On tap for this school year, the team is developing a multi-media arts composition project in which we have commissioned a renowned composer to collaboratively design and compose with the students in all of our program's artistic disciplines (Creative Writing, Dance, Film & New Media, Acting, Design & Production, and Visual Arts). Among the project goals is to help students redefine traditional parameters around musical media while meaningfully engaging them and demystifying the compositional process.

JOSHUA EMANUEL
Music Teacher
A. MacArthur Barr Middle School, Nanuet, New York

If we as educators buy into our students, they will buy into our classes. I approach this from three different directions: I value and represent the music that my students value, my students play their music, and I've learned to say "yes."

The music that my students listen to has a place in music class. I am not suggesting that we use popular music at the expense of other styles of music, but rather in addition to—a both/and approach. Having students study music that is important to them and by artists who look like them can be highly motivating.

In my sixth-grade general music class, they learn to play ukulele with the help of play-along videos from YouTube. Students can choose from more than 800 videos that I've curated spanning diverse genres and time periods. This allows students to play with actual recordings of the songs that they like while gaining the skills and understanding of the ukulele that I design for. In my eighth-grade general music class, students analyze popular songs before working with lyrics and in a digital audio workstation to create their own music in a genre of their choice. They are able to experiment with built-in loops to make something that reflects their interests, while I take a guide-on-the-side approach to the teacher's role.

When a student comes to me with an idea, the answer is usually "yes." Most are looking for a way to challenge themselves and use their creativity. In my fifth-grade band, a student asked me at the beginning of the year if they could play something they learned for the class. Class performances have become a weekly occurrence with students performing music of their choice for the class, either individually or in a small group. So many students want to perform that it often takes up most of the class period. The pride that students take in their performance is an added benefit to the practice of playing in front of an audience and building confidence.

The throughline of these ideas is student autonomy. If students feel that they have a say when it comes to their learning, they are more engaged. Whether it's being able to analyze their favorite song, learn to play the latest meme song on ukulele, or contribute to the class culture, these moments show students that they matter and that their ideas matter. When students see themselves in the curriculum, they are more excited to learn.

If students feel that they have a say when it comes to their learning, they are more engaged. Whether it's being able to analyze their favorite song, learn to play the latest meme song on ukulele, or contribute to the class culture, these moments show students that they matter and that their ideas matter.

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LATASHA CASTERLOW-LALLA AND MARTINA VASIL

"Not Like Us": What Are We Saying with Our Current Recruitment and Auditioning Processes?

Pandagolik / iStock / Getty Images Plus

Kendrick Lamar's historic Superbowl Halftime Show has been stuck in our heads since his performance in February 2025. In particular, the song "Not Like Us" reminded us of a persistent problem in the field of music education—that people who want to be music teachers but who are "not like us" will not be admitted to a music teacher education program. Traditional large ensembles (i.e., band, choir, orchestra), Western classical music, and standard Western notation are centered in conservatory-based music programs. As a result, students who play other instruments and genres and read other types of notations are often left without options to study at the post-secondary level.

Faculty and administration involved with auditions hold assumptions that prospective students had sequential musical instruction in K–12 schools, access to high-quality instruments, and varied performance opportunities. These are external factors that are unlikely to be controlled by parents or students. Further, to close any instructional gaps in musical preparation, students' families would need the financial means to access private lessons, camps, or clinics.

These expectations are unusual when considering that most fields either do not require such prerequisite knowledge prior to entry or allow students to begin a degree as a pre-major while taking prerequisite courses during their first year (e.g., elementary education, nursing, engineering). Some may argue that GPA and test scores are equivalent to what music schools do with auditions; however, those can be just as structurally biased.

In this article, we refer to NAfME's *A Blueprint for Strengthening the Music Teacher Profession* to examine a challenge during the degree program: persistent inequities in how students are recruited and auditioned.

Historical Evolution of Recruitment and Auditioning

Current recruitment and auditioning processes in music education in the United States are rooted in traditions established in European music conservatories centuries ago. Conservatories reflected the values and musical preferences of the upper and middle classes, and instruction followed the apprentice-master model, where students were mentored one-on-one with a master musician to prepare them to perform in professional ensembles. The curriculum centered on performance, music history, and music theory of the Western art music tradition.[1]

European musicians traveled to the United States to recruit talent, bringing with them the values and practices of their conservatories, which were then emulated in American music education. The establishment of the New England Conservatory in Boston in 1867 marked the beginning of formal conservatory education in the U.S., followed by the creation of other major conservatories including Oberlin, Peabody, and the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music (now the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music). Wealthy donors played a significant role in funding conservatories, including the Eastman School of Music, the Curtis Institute, and Juilliard. Only after World War II did U.S. conservatories diversify the curriculum beyond classical music training, incorporating jazz, commercial music, and music technology.[2]

Although varied musical genres have been added to curricula, most music education programs have yet to crack the glass ceiling and have

equitable, comprehensive offerings. For example, popular music as a major area of study is not available in most music education programs across the nation. Popular music courses may be offered as electives but are not required for music education students, though there are exceptions at various institutions. To effectively embrace student voice and choice in K–12 classrooms, future music educators must be prepared to support instructional practices for a wide variety of musical genres.

Challenges

When a student engages in music education in elementary and secondary schools, their families often have limited say in the goals and implementation aspects of the programs, such as the level of rigor or students' participation in competition-based experiences like adjudications. In addition, the performing arts are often among the first content areas selected for budgetary cuts, leading to significant interruptions in students' development of skills and technique. There is a disconnect between the fiscal issues of maintaining K–12 program offerings and the high expectations of post-secondary programs rooted in conservatory-based expectations.

A HOMOGENIZED WORKFORCE

With such narrowly defined access points, the demographics of music educators in the U.S. are unsurprisingly homogenous. Most preservice music teachers are white and have been trained in conservatory-based preparation programs.[3] In what ways are music education programs making space for potential students who are from areas that may be struggling to maintain their music programs? There is a need to explore the opportunities available to students and the unspoken challenges of structural inequities embedded in the recruitment, auditioning, and selection processes for post-secondary music studies.

The current recruitment and auditioning processes pose numerous challenges for prospective students. For example, in her 2008 article "Listening for Whiteness: Hearing Racial Politics in Undergraduate School Music," Julia Koza examined vocal auditions at her school of music. She found a host of issues, including (1) an expectation of singing knowledge and ability that privileged entry to those who could afford private voice lessons prior to auditions, (2) limited repertoire accepted as audition material (i.e., European/American high art *bel canto* tradition) that explicitly told applicants not to sing music from jazz, pop, rock, folk, or musical theater, and (3) an expectation to read standard Western notation. Nearly 20 years after Koza's examination, another study published by Joseph Abramo and Cara Bernard titled "Barriers to Access and University Schools of Music" revealed the same issues.[4]

According to a 2021 report by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the racial diversity of K–12 student enrollment in the U.S. continues to evolve.[5] While there is a projected decline in overall student enrollment, increases by race are imminent and relevant to this discussion. The NCES report states, "public school enrollments are projected to be higher for Asian, Hispanic and students of Two or More races." It is possible that these changes in racial makeup will indicate concurrent shifts in musical practices, traditions, and cultures. How are post-secondary programs preparing for the potential changes in musical background, knowledge, perspective, and training in potential students? Are they prepared to welcome the musical diversity of these future students?

CENTERING SPECIFIC PEDAGOGIES AND GENRES

Since the conservatory model is a widely applied approach in colleges and universities in the U.S., the presence of Western classical music is prioritized as the dominant benchmark for technical mastery.

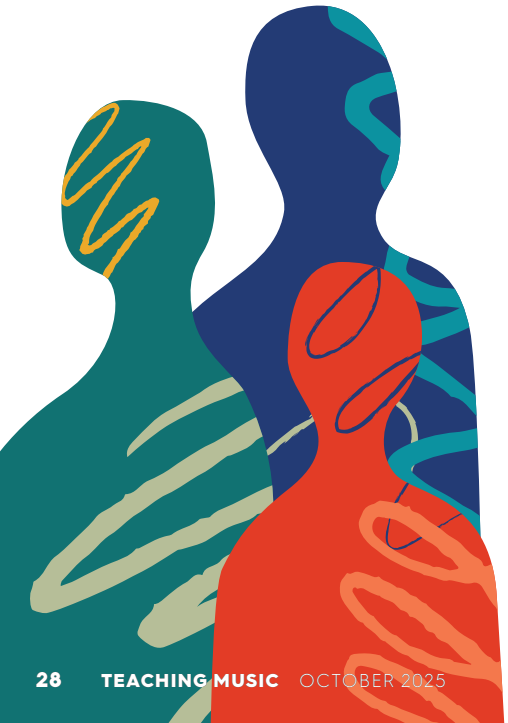
There is a disconnect between the fiscal issues of maintaining K–12 program offerings and the high expectations of post-secondary programs rooted in conservatory-based expectations.

According to education researchers Cecilia Almqvist and Ann Werner, the master-apprentice model is the most preferred approach to educating musicians, emphasizing competence, organizational and relational levels.[6] This approach highlights the importance of the influence of the master on the apprentice, who typically repeats and continues the musical styles, genres, and values prioritized by the teacher. The values that are elevated may reflect a narrow repertoire view that leans into Western musical notation, concert- or orchestral-based instrumentation, and sequential instruction that may not be in the control of the community in which a student may happen to reside. Students have expressed the desire to contribute to societal change through, for example, increased possibilities to choose repertoire, to include extra-musical features, and to practice activism during (and through) their education.[7]

Students residing in rural areas, underfunded suburbs, and urban cities may be disproportionately marginalized, as their musical upbringing highlights a wide array of genres, including hip hop, rock, jazz, mariachi, soca, salsa, and Bollywood (to name a few). These genres often do not align with the predominant offerings within collegiate programs. For music education to remain current, there needs to be an effort to embrace future students with skill sets reflecting various genres,

self-taught exploration, and digital application of musicianship. Music educators must also create space for the demonstration of musical abilities that are self-taught, highlight cultural genres, and embrace the musical interests of pre-service music educators. While it is important to maintain high standards of musical skills, we must expand post-secondary programs to embrace multiple pathways to express varied types of knowledge and embrace innovation, authenticity, and creativity that are often deeply rooted in the lived experiences of students.

An unintentional consequence of maintaining specific traditions may be that they limit the scope of musical experiences seen during the recruitment and auditioning process. The narrow view may lead the profession to miss out on the immense talents of potentially incredible teachers in the pipeline, thus impacting the artistic ecosystem of style. The evolution of our content thrives on the collective fusion of styles, genres, and perspectives to unearth new musical styles.



The narrow view may lead the profession to miss out on the immense talents of potentially incredible teachers in the pipeline, thus impacting the artistic ecosystem of style.

Reconceptualizing Recruitment and Auditions

New processes and ways for K–12 and university educators to work collaboratively are needed to widen opportunities for potential students. For example, the University of Pikeville in Kentucky has audition requirements that are broader than many schools. For music education auditions, those who play a wind or string instrument are asked to prepare two pieces "of any genre on their instrument(s) of choice." Voice music education applicants must prepare "two contrasting prepared pieces of any genre." Even though restrictions are still evident (e.g., vocal music education applicants must do a sight-reading exercise, and percussion music education applicants are limited in what percussion instruments they can audition on), this is an example of a relatively more open audition process.

Music is a creative art form. Why aren't these creative skills included in auditions? Intentionally creating opportunities to have students demonstrate their mastery in composition, track creation, songwriting construction, and the infusion of varying musical instruction would encourage institutions to demonstrate the value of creativity in a multitude of ways in degree programs. The beauty of music lies in the manipulation of musical elements to achieve creativity and performance excellence, thereby connecting with others and responding within oneself. An examination of the audition structure that elevates a limited landscape is essential.

Recommendations

Here are several recommendations for future recruitment and auditioning processes:

- Broaden the musical instruments and genres that students can use to audition for admission to post-secondary programs.
- Music reflects the lived experiences of individuals. Embrace audition opportunities for students to showcase their largest and most diverse skill sets.
- Reflect on your institution's capacity to let candidates build upon their prior knowledge. Consider applicants' potential to contribute to the community in multiple ways.
- Do not require a specific genre for auditions; allow students to perform two contrasting pieces.
- Allow students to demonstrate music literacy in other ways beyond sight reading standard Western music notation (e.g., chord charts, lead sheets, playing back by rote).

Closing Thoughts

Music education continues to be a vital component of students' holistic educational experience. As a professional field, it is crucial that we expand access for prospective music educators to continue to share the joy of music making with future generations. K–12 and collegiate professionals can continue to honor the history of traditional content while elevating trends in music, ensuring students remain connected to developments in the field while providing them with conventional knowledge. The time has come to embrace new approaches to recruit

interested students to continue the health of the music education profession and engage in more opportunities to make music reflecting those we serve—our students.

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RON GERHARDSTEIN, WITH DANIELLE DAVEY, ED PROTZMAN, AND JOEY SCOTT

Optimizing Transfer Pathways: Helping Music Majors Thrive in the Transfer from Two-Year to Four-Year Colleges

Numerous factors influence a student's college choice. An important part of the conversation for many students and their families is whether to begin their college studies at a community college before transferring to a four-year university. Given the rise in nationally available free or low-cost tuition tandem programs between high schools and community colleges, along with concerns about taking on too much student debt, many students and their families make the decision to begin at a local community college.

In a highly sequenced collegiate degree program like music, collaboration between community college and university faculty is important. Intentional guidance for music transfer students and timely, accurate information about the transfer process are vital not only for retention purposes but for the welcoming institution to function as a community of care. Simply put: Success for ALL students includes music transfer students.

Four Pacific Northwest band directors and music education colleagues provide their observations and advice for strengthening the connection between two- and four-year music programs.

Members of this shared discussion are working to make a difference for music transfer students in their communities:

Danielle Davey, Director of Bands and Instructor of Music, Mt. Hood Community College, Gresham, Oregon

Ron Gehardstein, Associate Professor of Music and Director of Band Studies, Pacific Lutheran University, Parkland, Washington

Ed Protzman, Director of Bands and an Assistant Professor of Music Education, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon

Joey Scott, Assistant Professor of Instrumental Music and Band Director, Pierce College, Puyallup, Washington

QUESTION 1: Thinking either about your current community college students planning to transfer into a four-year music program or the transfer students already in your college music program, please comment on the strength areas that you see from this student population.

Danielle – Many of our students are considered nontraditional, an umbrella term used to include first-generation students, anyone who has taken a break from college and is returning, or a student who waited a few years to start college. A major strength I see from our nontraditional students is their work ethic and lack of entitlement. Additionally, our older students have had more life experience and can act as coaches for our traditional (18-year-old) students. The amount of diversity that each student brings with them is a strength to our program.

Ed – The community college transfer students at Portland State University (PSU) have a diverse educational perspective since they have had additional music experiences post-high school and before entering a four-year school. They bring a different perspective

and are typically older than the traditional new students, resulting in a musical and a personal maturity.

Joey – Transfer students are not a monolith. Often transfer students come with greater maturity and a focus on completing their degree in a timely manner. Sometimes coming from a nontraditional background makes transfer students more hard-working and resilient in the classroom. They tend to think outside the box. Of course, some of my students want or need to live close to home with their support network and they are looking for one-on-one attention, small class sizes, and to save money.

Ron – Transfer students typically have important experience balancing both their academic and personal lives, including work and family. They are goal-oriented and serious about navigating their education even in the face of academic setbacks. The Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) offers music transfer students flexibility in that they have minimal general education courses to complete.

QUESTION 2: Thinking either about your community college students planning to transfer into a four-year music program or the transfer students already in your college music program, please comment on the challenges facing this student population.

Danielle – Our college serves the highest poverty rate per capita in our state, which brings a unique set of challenges, especially for those who are first-generation college students. Many times, there is not much support from home. Teaching students how to verbalize the importance of college and the importance of showing up every day can be challenging. I've noticed that many students don't know how to advocate for themselves or how to ask questions to seek help. During the first week of classes, we take students on a campus tour to show them the locations of the food bank, our administration building for registration and financial assistance, the library, and our Accessible Education Services office.

Ed – The biggest challenge we face at PSU relates to the academic and musical differences at the community colleges that typically feed into our school. Some programs are well established, and the faculty are excellent at making sure that the students are prepared for the four-year degree program, and others are less so.

Joey – My concerns are less on the music side of things and more on the overall experience at the four-year school. My students are concerned about not only the cost barriers but also potential cultural and social stigmas at four-year colleges and not feeling included by their faculty and peers. Another concern is the pacing of coursework in individual classes and the flexibility and expectations of the professors. The culture, diversity, and inclusiveness of the four-year school music program is an important factor.

Ron – Some of our music transfer students come to us with all of the general education course credits and a healthy dose of college music classes in the core sequence (music theory, ear training, keyboarding, and private lessons), while others have not yet had any classes in the music core. Additionally, our music theory and ear training classes are separate courses, and at most of the community colleges that feed into my school, these classes are combined. While navigating the music degree core classes can be challenging for any student, the path for our transfer students is often uneven. Another challenge for some is the access to private lessons during their community college experience. Music transfer students also need to be able to hit the ground running as there is very little time to ease into college. We notice that transfer students can really struggle when they need extra time to get acclimated.

QUESTION 3: Music transfer students may have unique advising needs compared to students in four-year degree programs. What challenges have you observed in this area and what strategies for improvement have you implemented?

Danielle – Our community college has a 100% acceptance rate, but that doesn't mean that all students are ready to jump in as music majors; the degree is rigorous. We offer a placement test in the summer or during the first class in the fall. Based on the results of their test, the faculty know if they can jump into the music major sequence of courses or if they will need to take a year to work on fundamentals. We have implemented new courses for these students and other non-majors such as Music Fundamentals, Piano Fundamentals, Voice Fundamentals, Music in Cinema, History of Rock, and Jazz History. Plus, we encourage students to take lessons and to join a large or small ensemble.

Ed – Advising issues are more institution to institution rather than student to institution. If the two programs are not working together, the community college student can take courses that they do not need, or they may not have taken courses that they, in fact, do need. The schools can save students from these issues by communicating and working to line up their curricula.

Joey – One challenge that we have seen is the inconsistency in honoring Direct Transfer Agreements (DTAs). Students need to ask their new school exactly what the DTA will

cover and what it will not. In music, some students face a duplication of coursework or the need to retake a course that they have already completed due to the placement exam at the new institution. There can be advising challenges between the two-year and the four-year school, including how long it will take to complete the degree program at the four-year school.

Ron – I have learned that transfer students have their own unique advising needs that are different from an incoming first-year student. Essentially, transfer students need clear and consistent advice on completing the music core classes, degree assessments, and the sequence and scheduling of courses. These issues certainly relate to all undergraduate music education students, but things can quickly become difficult for our transfer students if our faculty advisors are not paying attention to our course sequence and schedule. Because of this, we have consistent advisors for our transfer students, especially in the Bachelor of Music Education (BME) degree. In addition, the admissions office has a counselor specifically dedicated to transfer students. This collaboration has also been helpful for both advising and scheduling of the first semester of coursework. One big step in alleviating the mystery of transferring has been in-person visits to talk with community college students about the application and audition process at my university, our degree programs, and advising specifically.

QUESTION 4: Please share about the process of transfer from your community college to a four-year school or into your university from a community college. Please comment on both the general university requirements (Gen Ed) and the coursework in the Music Core (Music Theory, Ear Training, Keyboarding, Lessons, and Ensembles).

Danielle – I believe that we have a unique situation in Oregon where we have articulation agreements with a few schools. This means that as long as students earned Bs or better in all of our core music classes, they will walk in as juniors—no questions asked. However, this program was set up after a year's worth of meetings in which the four-year university faculty looked over our teaching materials and syllabi. It is still up to the student to play an audition and be placed at the appropriate level for their current playing ability.

Another element of transfer that we have worked on is our private lessons program. We have a weekly recital hour, plus all students are required to perform an end-of-term jury in front of a panel of faculty. In their freshman year, students tell us their top two schools they want to transfer to. The private instructor looks at those audition requirements and starts using those as a guide for what students work on in their lessons.

Many of our students transfer to Portland State University. PSU has made significant changes to be more transfer student friendly, such as moving their 200-level Introduction to Music Education course into the fall term of the junior year. Our students transfer and can finish their degree in two years.

Ed – PSU does not require a lot of general education courses for students. In place of multiple general education courses, students take what are called inquiry classes on combined subjects. This means that community college students often take general education courses that they do not need at PSU. They can use some as electives, but they may have courses on their transcript that don't count toward their degree. Our music education department works hard to communicate with our community college programs in the area so that we can align our courses.

Joey – Right now, one of our most active relationships is with Pacific Lutheran University (PLU). Having representatives from a four-year colleague come to campus to speak with students is often one of the first steps. This leads to a conversation and overview of the application and scholarship audition process, placement exams, and a discussion about the different degree programs. I encourage our community college students to reach out to the transfer advisor at the four-year institution so they can have a clear understanding of what courses will transfer and how they transfer.

Ron – Nearly all transfer students enter with a full Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA), which takes care of all the general education requirements except for one. Transferring music courses is more challenging because of the series of placement exams in the music core. We try our best to land our transfer students where they need to be in the music theory, ear training, and keyboarding sequence. Given our sophomore performance assessment, junior level teaching assessment, and the senior recital and student teaching, it takes transfer students three years to complete their degree. The great news is that the DTA is so helpful in terms of scheduling and having manageable course loads.

QUESTION 5: Please share your thoughts on any *next steps* that you would like to see at your university to make the process of transfer smoother or more streamlined.

Danielle – I would like to see as much collaboration as possible!

Ed – We need to reach out to schools that are farther away from our location to help them understand what their students need when they consider transferring to our university.

I have learned that transfer students have their own unique advising needs that are different from an incoming first-year student.

Joey – Articulation agreements between two-year and four-year colleges. I'd like to see four-year colleges be more proactive about reaching out to community colleges and helping to create guided pathways to help students.

Ron – I would like to see more face-to-face advising for transfer students prior to arriving at our university. Anything that helps make the process smoother through the music education degree program would be welcome. I would also like to see more collaboration between our studio faculty and our community colleges to build relationships with future students. Community college music programs deserve the same kind of intentional recruiting that we give to our local and regional high school music programs.

QUESTION 6: Considering the importance of the relationship between two-year and four-year music faculty, please share your thoughts and/or specific strategies to improve the lines of communication, assist the recruiting process, and increase collaboration.

Danielle – Get to know your colleagues! If someone is new to their job, send them an email and invite them out for coffee. I invite our four-year university ensemble directors out a few times a year. It's important for my students and those directors to know each other before transferring. A shared concert is also great!

Ed – It's important to have open communication between programs. The four-year school cannot take the stance that it's the responsibility of the community college to figure everything out on their own. Combined activities with ensembles from each school can be a great gateway for students.

Joey – Important items include shared concerts, campus visits, partnerships between NAfME Collegiate chapters, open dialogue and communication, and a shared vision around student success.

Ron – Face-to-face time with transfer students is critical. Our audition process is great, but the interview time period is so short—far too short for our transfer students, especially in music education. Simply sharing the performance calendar for the upcoming year is also a good tip. Finally, we have to be mindful that our recruitment outreach that is so often geared toward high school juniors and seniors needs to include students at our local community colleges.

The best recruitment and retention practices are well-planned and intentional. The NAfME *Blueprint for Strengthening the Music Teacher Profession* outlines numerous action items for our community to consider before, during, and after students are enrolled in collegiate music education programs. The discussions and action items surrounding this work are already having an impact simply in terms of starting a collective conversation.

As we move forward with the *Blueprint* as a guide, let us not forget that there are multiple pathways in and out of collegiate music education programs. Community college transfer students must clearly be part of the conversation about *before college* and *during college* preparation and planning. To ensure that all students thrive and persist in our field, let's work to provide a smoother pathway for our community college students to transition into undergraduate music education programs. These efforts will not only aid our community college transfer student population, but they will also improve the recruitment and retention of all collegiate music education majors and pre-service teachers.

KELLY PARKES AND SARAH NIETUPSKI

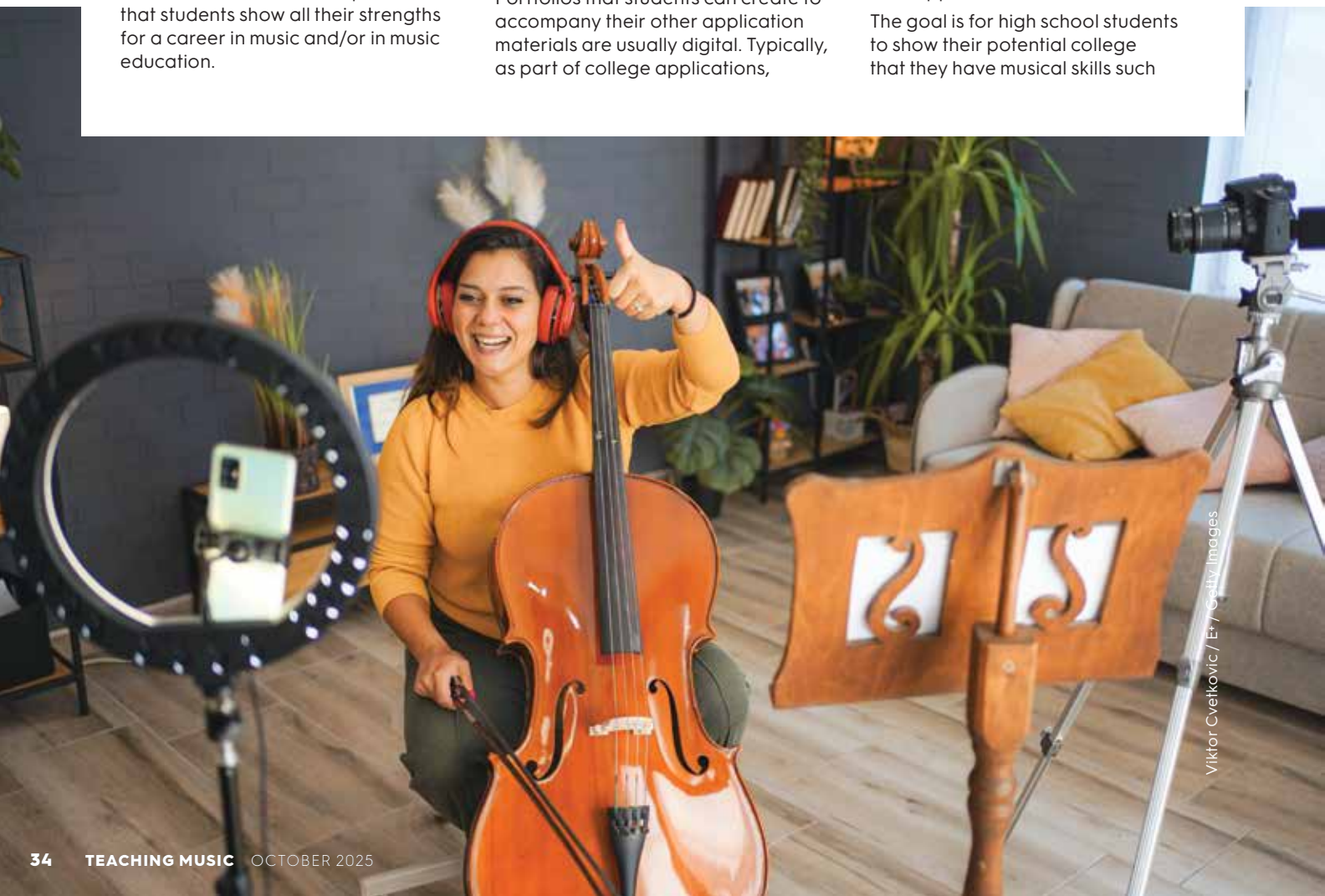
Submitting Digital Student Portfolios as College Application Supplemental Materials: Tips for Teachers

The university audition season is right around the corner, and high school students will soon be getting ready to apply for college music and music education degree programs. Students and their teachers may not be aware that, in addition to the typical audition and interview process, many universities allow applicants to add a portfolio that showcases other skills. To meet the challenge of entry to college auditions, as noted in NAfME's *Blueprint for Strengthening the Music Teacher Profession,* it is important that students show all their strengths for a career in music and/or in music education.

The *Blueprint* was created by a task force of NAfME leaders representing institutions of higher education across the country who conducted research related to the challenges facing the field. The first challenge they identified relates to "high school students as they decide to pursue a career in music education." This article provides guidance for helping high school students prepare to pursue a career in music education by creating additional materials that highlight their strengths.

Portfolios that students can create to accompany their other application materials are usually digital. Typically, as part of college applications, students must share their GPA, a short essay, their transcripts, a resume or list of work experiences, awards, community service, and extracurricular activities, and letters of recommendation from their high school teachers. Even these required documents may not show the full extent or array of musical or personal attributes and skills, so we recommend that students create a digital portfolio to accompany their applications. Students can share or embed the link to their portfolio within their application materials.

The goal is for high school students to show their potential college that they have musical skills such



Viktor Cvetkovic / E+ / Getty Images

For compositions, composer and educator Brooke Pierson shares the following:

A good portfolio should do two things: (1) best represent their ability as a composer and (2) if appropriate, represent a variety of musical attempts in different styles/genres. The presentation of the portfolio should be clear, concise, and easy to read. Proofread for all typos, notation errors, or sound issues (with a Digital Audio Workstation, DAW). All files should be sure to work on multiple devices—sometimes those generated with a Mac will not open properly due to codec use, so students need to watch out for them.

as composition, improvisation, songwriting, recording, and/or arranging in addition to their performance skills. Students can also include videos of their performances in multi-genre settings, such as popular music, folk and indigenous music, church, and family settings. Teaching videos showing, for instance, seniors working with freshman sectionals or coaching another student in a class or private lesson, can also be included. Music teachers can support their seniors by helping them create these videos.

Creating digital portfolios offers a beneficial opportunity for high school seniors to illustrate a wide range of musical skills that sometimes get overlooked in a typical audition or interview-only process. These materials allow students to share more about their strengths as well-rounded musicians and music makers. Students often feel confused as to what they need to do to be ready for college auditions. By including supplemental materials digitally, students can maximize their application strengths.

Most colleges of music still require an audition for acceptance, and while this requirement may not change anytime soon, we suggest that students can increase their application strength by adding these materials, even if they are not required or requested by the college.

Some colleges require a portfolio like this example from the University of New Haven, which illustrates what some schools may seek within these additional materials. In general, the portfolio should highlight several musical and creative interests, talents, and achievements. The New Haven example is a good model to follow because it shows the variety of artifacts that could be included, along with examples of descriptions for each artifact in the portfolio *(https://www.newhaven.edu/admissions/undergraduate/the-application-process/music-portfolio-requirements.php)*.

> Your portfolio should aim to demonstrate your musical & creative interests, talents and achievements in your work. Submissions of creative work should not exceed 15 minutes. This portfolio will be reviewed in conjunction with your application for admission to the University of New Haven. Examples of creative work may include:
>
> - An original composition/song/track.
> - An original arrangement or orchestration of a preexisting composition.
> - A piece of music that clearly demonstrates creative production techniques including recording, editing or other contributions.

Recommendations from Teachers to Help High School Students Prepare

1. **Students create a professional email account through Google with an email address that is identifiable and mature. Gmail is widely accepted and will not disappear with their school accounts when they graduate K–12.**
2. **Create a Google Drive folder to house videos, compositions, and audio files for free, and make it shareable. Portfolio materials should not exceed 10–15 minutes. Use clear file names and avoid the use of unnecessary characters (e.g., !@#$%^&*~`).**
3. **Clean up the folder and remove unnecessary materials.**
4. **Provide links in the applications to the additional materials with curated annotations describing what to expect. Reference the materials in the application responses to encourage admissions committees to open links.**

Recommended Resources

- Contact local state music education associations for information on music colleges or schools in the state.
- Contact the college admissions team member in music, specifically, to obtain the instructions for applications and to inquire about where a portfolio might be best suited in their application system.
- Contact the applied studio and music education professors directly. Their emails are usually listed on their college websites. College professors are typically very happy to chat directly with high school students.
- Create a website to house all application materials. Several platforms, including Wix, Squarespace, IONOS, and Jimdo, can help you get started, and some offer a free option.
- Get comfortable with the SlideRoom application. It receives application materials on behalf of colleges, which is often required as part of the Common App, if colleges require additional materials *(https://www.slideroom.com/commonapp/guide/)*.
- Use online tools to create a portfolio that showcases your unique skills and strengths, and include a URL to your portfolio website in your applications *(https://scholarships360.org/college-admissions/college-portfolio/)*.
- Open a free GoogleDrive account with a Google email that is used exclusively for college applications *(https://support.google.com/a/users/answer/9310249/)*.

Creating digital portfolios offers a beneficial opportunity for high school seniors to illustrate a wide range of musical skills that sometimes get overlooked in a typical audition or interview-only process.

- Films or videos for which you have composed music or created sound.
- Electronic music system design.
- Software coding, implementation and integration in your music.
- Performance Videos - multiple instruments or ensembles.

When submitting portfolios for our music programs, please be sure to include information describing:

- A thorough explanation of your role/roles in the creation of this work.
- The title and nature of the piece.
- Your creative methodology.

How to Submit Your Portfolio: When You Submit Your Common Application

- In the Common Application, applicants will use the online file management system, SlideRoom, to submit a portfolio for review. From SlideRoom, you can upload images, digital and multimedia files, embedded media, and more – all in one place.
- By submitting your portfolio this way, SlideRoom is accessed from within the Common Application and submitted together with your admission application.

If a college uses the Common Application and requires portfolio materials, applicants create a membership account on SlideRoom, which seamlessly houses all portfolio materials in one location. A SlideRoom account requires an additional fee, but applicants may still choose to use it for portfolio materials, even when not required. Cost-conscious or free alternatives like Google Drive are also available.

If the college does not have a portfolio requirement, high school students and their teachers can look for a prompt for supplemental materials and add a Word document that includes the URL to the portfolio and is clearly labeled on each document file name—for example, TeachingVideoURL.docx or CompositionPerformance.docx or EportfolioURL.docx. Avoid sending materials without clear file titles and brief explanations.

We recommend that high school students and their teachers reach out to the colleges directly to ensure the expectations for materials are clear and to understand which platforms the college uses for their application and audition process. Helping high school students prepare college applications can feel overwhelming, but by understanding what is expected of them and using shared resources, teachers can increase the likelihood that their students will continue their pursuits in music and music education.

KELLY PARKES is Chair of the Department of Music Education in the College of Music at the University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado.

SARAH NIETUPSKI is a 7–12 Instrumental Music Teacher at Michigan Center Jr./Sr. High in Jackson, Michigan.

What non-ensemble music course most influenced your growth as a music teacher, and why?

JOSE PRIETO

K–4 Elementary General Music Teacher

Fairmeadow Elementary School,
Palo Alto, California

When I first started my undergraduate degree at the University of Miami, I was very much on the fence about whether or not I actually wanted to teach, let alone what or how I wanted to teach. Soon I developed an intense passion for music education thanks to my amazing peers and great professors. A course on teaching general music made a significant impact on my journey.

My professors provided us with what was essentially a master class in teaching music. We were constantly given opportunities to teach and share and receive constructive feedback in class. We were also exposed to many different approaches to teaching music and how the concepts overlap and differ. For a field experience component we were assigned a mentor teacher at a local elementary school and worked with real kids every week. This course was one of the only times I can remember feeling truly engaged and fulfilled in my learning as a student, and I knew that was how I wanted to make my students feel in the future.

ASHANTE GRIFFIN

Choral Director

Mundy's Mill High School,
Jonesboro, Georgia

NAfME *Teaching Music* Advisory Committee Member

I had the honor and privilege of attending a college preparatory high school in Detroit, Michigan. I chose music as my major and had classes that would closely resemble those that I would take in college. Along with multiple ensemble classes, I took music history, harmony, music theory, piano, etc. The class that helped me to grow as a music teacher the most was music theory. That course laid the foundation for my other music classes. The teacher did a great job ensuring we thoroughly understood how to analyze music. I easily transferred those skills to my piano and chorus classes. It made my job as a section leader much easier as well. I am also sure that it helped with ear-training and sight-reading because of the lessons on tonality, chord progressions, and harmonic relationships we learned. Those theory lessons made learning music simpler because I could utilize the skills to sight-read my music, play it for others, and analyze the repertoire. Due to the foundation of those music courses, I was further along than many other students in college who had only taken chorus, band, orchestra, or piano in high school.

The structure of the class and the discipline that the teacher required also helped shape the kind of music teacher I wanted to be. I want students to enjoy learning about music, but I also want them to take it seriously. Many students tend to believe that reading music is easy or unnecessary. However, I disagree. I believe that music analysis separates good musicians from great musicians. Truly understanding every aspect of the music that you perform or teach helps you to create the vision that the composer or arranger had in mind when they wrote the piece. My high school theory teacher taught us to respect deadlines, to turn in quality work, and to think before we speak. I began to love theory in her class, and that love flourished in all other areas of music. I wish all music students could take Beginning Music Theory because of the benefits to a performer's understanding and mastery of their instrument. I received a comprehensive musical experience in high school, and it paid off tremendously!

CHRIS ENRIQUES

General Music Teacher

Moriarty Environmental Sciences Magnet Elementary School, Norwich, Connecticut

My Special Education in Music class showed me how to easily and efficiently incorporate strategies such as Universal Design for Learning and spiraling lesson planning. Likewise, the benefits to student success in the content and building their confidence are immeasurable. If you plan for their success, they will succeed.

In this class, my professor took a flipped-classroom approach in which we did the learning outside the classroom (readings, videos, PowerPoints) and got to experience the content and put it into practice within our class time through discussion, lesson planning, class activities, or discussion with other professors at other universities.

As students, we found that this approach allowed us to create connections with the content in unique ways that worked for us. We had more time to sit with it, think about it, and apply it in various ways. Through this, we came to class feeling more prepared and ready to learn through doing rather than only listening.

Because of this class, I feel I can confidently adapt my instruction for a wide variety of learners while meeting content standards and maintaining my philosophy of giving every child a safe space to be themselves through music.

MICHAEL WIDJAJA

Student in Music Education

The Hartt School, University of Hartford, West Hartford, Connecticut

The Elementary and Secondary Instrumental Methods sequence I took during my junior year taught me that *I am not going to teach like my favorite educators*. Wait—what? That realization came at me like a curveball. Yes, we were diving deep into the importance of sequencing, structure, and pacing in our lessons. We were studying pedagogies from leading thinkers in our field. Yet, what stuck with me most was the idea that teaching is not just a science—it is also an art. And what makes it 10 times better is that I already have plenty of experience with the art form that I am attempting to teach—music!

I began to see that what works for one teacher in one room may completely flop for another. I was trying to emulate my favorite educators in my first weeks of the practicum piece of the course, hoping that I would get their results, but I realized that was not authentic to who I am or to the content I was teaching. This course gave me permission to trust myself as an educator. I learned that what I bring to the classroom—my quirks, my energy, my perspective—has value. In fact, it is the value. Once I embraced that, I could apply the strategies and theories I was learning in natural and true ways, which helped me better put my students and their learning above everything else.

With a solid foundation rooted in authenticity, I began to teach authentically, and just as importantly, to reflect. I saw what worked, what did not, and how to adapt for the next time. Real growth came from applying the theory I was learning. No amount of theory could replace what I learned by standing in front of a classroom and trying it out. These method courses did not show me how to teach. They showed me how to teach like myself, and that has made the largest impact on my growth.

SHELLY COLE

Director of Choirs

Piper High School, Kansas City, Kansas

KMEA Tri-M Chair

NAfME Southwest District Tri-M Council Representative

I found my technique and methods courses to be the most impactful non-performance classes I took—especially percussion techniques. As a flute and voice major, percussion felt completely foreign to me. I couldn't understand how anyone could create and memorize the intricate patterns of a cadence without fumbling.

I was fortunate to study under an amazing percussion professor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. He was not only calm, patient, and kind-hearted, he also possessed a subtly brilliant sense of humor. I remember one performance he guest conducted where he leaned down during the performance and asked to borrow my music. I looked up in panic and he just calmly turned back a page in his score and said, "Nevermind."

His straightforward and compassionate teaching style, combined with the onomatopoeic nature of how he taught drum rudiments, really stuck with me. It helped me find ways to turn seemingly abstract and nonsensical patterns into something memorable and accessible. Thirty years later, I still think of him and try to model my teaching methods after him.

KIRSTIN CARTER-JACKSON
B.M. Student in Music Education
Virginia State University,
Petersburg, Virginia

The non-ensemble courses that have most influenced my growth so far as an aspiring music teacher are Piano and Music Theory. These classes pushed me to think differently, more structurally, more intentionally, about how music works and how it can be taught.

Piano gave me a sense of practical musicianship that I know will be essential in the classroom. It taught me how to break things down, how to support others musically, and how to demonstrate concepts clearly. I realized that even simple accompaniments can make a big difference in helping students feel confident and supported while they're learning. I now see the piano not just as an instrument, but as a teaching tool I can always rely on.

Music Theory helped me start to understand the "why" behind the music. Learning how to analyze form, harmony, and rhythm has already shaped the way I listen and think. More importantly, it's helped me begin to understand how to explain those concepts to others. I'm learning that it's not enough to know music, I need to know how to communicate about music in a way that makes sense to students at different levels.

Both of these courses gave me confidence, clarity, and a deeper appreciation for the kind of educator I hope to become—one who can make music feel both understandable and meaningful for every student.

RODEL DOMINGO
B.Ed. Student in Music Education
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa,
Honolulu, Hawai'i

A non-ensemble music course that has influenced my growth as a music teacher is Asian and Pacific Music in Education. Hawai'i is a mosaic of cultures. My professor taught us the importance of teaching our future students to appreciate each other's cultural background through music.

Having been born and raised on the islands, I have always felt a deep connection to Hawaiian history. In this course, I was able to learn about the history of *meles* (poems, songs, or chants), the battles that Kamehameha I and his army fought in to unify the islands, and the annexation of Queen Lili'uokalani, the last reigning monarch of the Hawaiian Kingdom. We also studied the history of the neighboring Pacific groups such as the Chuuk, Kiribati, and Samoan people. Additionally, we learned about Asian immigrants, including Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos. We learned about the instruments they use, their history, the pedagogy of playing and teaching them, and the principles of teaching authentic music to our students. Teaching each instrument and piece of music to be true to its source helps us instill respect and responsibility in keeping their stories alive. This course helped me realize that the world is constantly evolving, and it's our responsibility as future educators to advocate for cultures and traditions to continue thriving for future generations.

During the same semester, our class participated in the *Symphony of the Hawai'i Forests* project, which culminated in an event involving schools ranging from elementary to high school and included a performance by the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra. This project addressed the importance of the perseverance of Hawaiian culture, history, nature, land, and waters. We had the opportunity to teach the students hula and explore its connection to the water cycle's role in forest growth. The water cycle includes the beach, ocean, sun, clouds, river, waterfall, uplands, pond, and taro. With our primary instruments, we performed chamber music inspired by these themes to showcase the four instrument families: woodwind, brass, string, and percussion.

These teaching experiences were both meaningful and challenging. I quickly realized that teaching younger students the sense of aloha doesn't happen automatically, as it requires patience, creativity, perseverance, and a deep understanding of Hawai'i's history. The aloha spirit goes beyond saying "hello" or showing kindness to others—it embodies the strength and cultural identity of the indigenous people. Fostering this idea early on helps guide our students to become devoted caretakers and protectors of Hawai'i's rich culture and environment. With this support and encouragement, I gradually became more open and receptive to teaching K–12. Each time I stepped in front of a class, my passion for teaching deepened.

DAVID DAVIS

Music Teacher

Park Spanish Immersion Elementary, St. Louis Park, Minnesota

I never planned to become a music teacher, until one class changed everything. Instrumental Pedagogy, taught by my saxophone professor, was the most influential non-ensemble course I ever took. It was the first time I realized that teaching isn't just about personality or intuition—it's rooted in cognitive science. He demystified concepts like scaffolding, simplification, modeling, the zone of proximal development, and multimodal instruction. I began to understand that effective teaching isn't about delivering information, but about intentionally designing learning experiences that align with how the brain actually learns.

This wasn't a lecture about pedagogy, it was pedagogy. My professor modeled each concept, then had us apply them by teaching real beginner students, recording ourselves, and reflecting on our practice together. It was an apprenticeship model that empowered us to learn by doing, with meaningful feedback. In a field where many new teachers feel unprepared, this course gave me the confidence, tools, and purpose to walk into the instrumental classroom ready to help students grow through an efficient and research-based approach to learning.

MICHAEL S. GORDON

Band & General Music Teacher

Middlebrook Middle School, Wilton, Connecticut

Fine and Performing Arts Instructional Leader, Music K–8

Equity & Inclusion Instructional Leader

While obtaining my undergraduate degree, I had the opportunity to take a music production course that left a lasting impact on both my technical and creative development. The course had a clear structure: presentation, demonstration, imitation, application, evaluation, and integration. This sequential approach allowed me to build a strong cognitive understanding before moving into hands-on practice. I was able to observe each concept being modeled on actual equipment, which helped me connect theoretical ideas with real-world applications. The process of imitating and then applying the techniques allowed me to gradually take ownership of the skills.

The geek in me was drawn to the technical aspect of being a sound engineer. The tasks of connecting input and output devices, understanding signal flow, and solving unexpected issues became second nature to me. I appreciated the clear-cut, yes-or-no nature of troubleshooting. A device was either working or not. This clarity helped me develop into a creative problem solver while sharpening my decision-making skills. At the same time, I had to approach each session with patience, compassion, and a willingness to learn and be flexible when working with others.

As a performer, the course gave me the freedom to explore my creative side. With the foundational technical skills already in place, I felt empowered to experiment with sound, try new effects, and incorporate innovative techniques into my work. It was a space where I could express myself without constraints, supported by a deeper understanding of the equipment and processes involved. This dual perspective, as engineer and performer, helped me understand the music production process from multiple angles, enhancing my versatility.

In the summer of 2023, I had the opportunity to travel throughout India as part of a self-designed course to play traditional instruments through a Fund for Teachers fellowship. That experience reinforced the value of facilitating a structured yet flexible learning process. Each stage (presentation, demonstration, imitation, application, evaluation, and integration) plays a vital role in developing well-rounded producers and consumers of music. I strive to create an environment where students not only acquire knowledge but also (1) apply it meaningfully, (2) reflect on their progress, and (3) integrate their experiences into new situations with growing independence. This approach nurtures their creative and collaborative growth, encourages them to be socially sensitive citizens, and increases their capacity toward becoming self-navigating expert learners.

AUSTIN ZHUANG
B.M. Student in Music Education
San José State University,
San José, California
NAfME San José State Collegiate
Chapter Past President

One of the most influential non-ensemble music courses for me has been my music education practicum. The course content went beyond merely understanding what extent of music theory should be covered—it offered insights into how students learn differently and how to adapt teaching methods to meet diverse needs.

The course emphasized active participation, mirroring the dynamic environment of a music classroom. We engaged in role-playing scenarios where we had to teach segments of a lesson to our peers. This hands-on approach helped bridge the gap between theory and application, allowing us to experiment with different teaching styles and receive constructive feedback.

My professor used an inspiring, reflective teaching approach. She continuously encouraged us to question and evaluate our teaching methods, pushing us to think critically and adaptively. We also studied various pedagogical models, such as the Kodály and Orff approaches. Understanding these methodologies enriched my teaching toolkit and enhanced my ability to cater to a range of learning styles.

We worked in groups to develop lesson plans, create programming for our several different music programs, and even create a mock budget for music boosters, should that apply. This experience highlighted the importance of collaboration and lifelong learning as a music educator, emphasizing that teaching is as much about listening and adapting as it is about instructing. This course helped shape my identity as a music teacher by equipping me with the necessary skills to be flexible, empathetic, and innovative in my teaching practice in the future.

ma_rish/ iStock / Getty Images Plus

ERIN BAILEY AND SHANE COLQUHOUN

Outside the Box: A Spotlight on Teachers Charting Nontraditional Paths

Kevin Longwill

Shelman Miller

James Kendrick

Danielle Collins

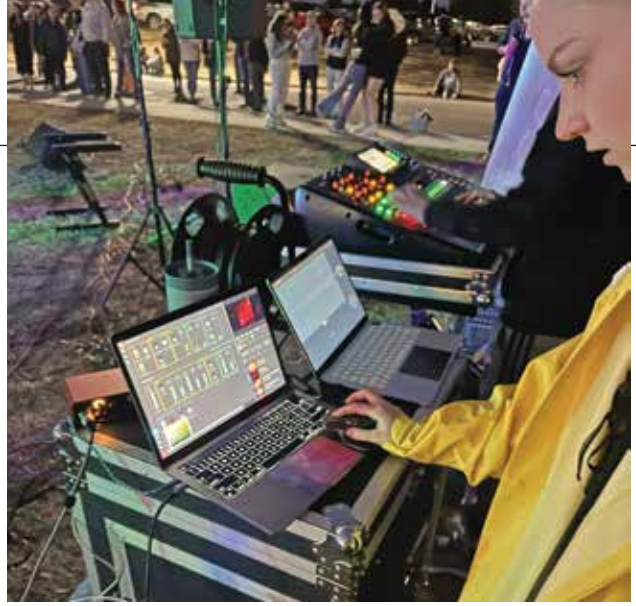
The process of preparing music educators to meet the needs of a nation with rich, diverse needs, cultures, and resources . . . will strengthen the probability of providing equitable, broad, and relevant music education experiences. . . . Music educators who are prepared in this way will be primed to lead and actualize any number of impactful music-making experiences, from the more traditional of our large ensembles to those that are highly reflective of students' lived experiences and backgrounds. (From the *Blueprint for Strengthening the Music Teacher Profession*, 2023).

Recently, a fellow music teacher educator (MTE) was talking about the 2023 *Blueprint for Strengthening the Music Teacher Profession*, and she confessed, "I totally agree with what I'm reading and I want to change up my course offerings, but I'm so overwhelmed. I don't even know where to begin!"

The work of four PK–12 teachers who have expanded their music programs offers an idea of "where to begin." Only one of these teachers even had an inkling that teaching a nontraditional music course could be in his future. In addition to sharing their stories, each of these teachers offered practical suggestions for music teacher preparation programs on ways that MTEs can support current undergraduate students who will be charting new paths and leading the way to the future of music education.

Spotlight on Music Technology and Industry

When Kevin Longwill was a music education student at Temple University, he attended a conference session presented by Will Kuhn, who discussed a high school music and media technology program he had started. Kevin thought to himself, "That would be so cool to do someday!" Kevin went on to teach strings, choir, and band in elementary, junior high, and high school settings in Pennsylvania. Kevin is now the Director of Music Industry for Abington High School and founded the district's music industry program, M3 (Modern Music Makers), which was named as one of Music for All's Advocacy in Action Award winners for 2024. His program prioritizes performance *and* production, featuring individual performers and student-run ensembles, a full production company that includes audio,



M3 students run tech for their shows.

video, lighting, and post-production, as well as a student-run record label.

Kevin's district offered mostly traditional music offerings such as marching band, wind band, orchestra, and choir until they decided to conduct a districtwide curriculum revision. The music teachers asked, "How can we reach all the students who do not enroll in traditional music offerings?" Without making any cuts to existing courses, they added classes exploring digital music and small group instrumental, vocal, and musical theater ensembles to the middle school and high school. At the high school, they also added modern band and expanded music technology courses, which now include songwriting and production. Focusing on student agency has enabled the program to respond to student interests and adapt the curriculum to address industry shifts and needs. The new courses attract students who were not previously involved in music at school; music course enrollment has nearly doubled. "We are reaching a completely different population of students. The numbers are up everywhere, not just in the music tech classes, traditional ensemble numbers are up too."

Kevin expressed gratitude for a required undergraduate course for all music education students titled Collaboration and Creativity in Music, which included songwriting and work with GarageBand. He also took additional music technology courses not required for his major and worked for the university on recording projects. Following his interests and passions allowed him to ask questions, take risks, and learn skills that are invaluable to him now. Kevin said all music teacher preparation programs should have a required course that explores creativity, modern band, and music technology, looking to the music industry for careers that our students might want to pursue.

But even more than skill development, he said, "We need an attitude development. We need to have a willingness to WANT to teach our unaffiliated students." Kevin suggested developing an attitude of wanting to engage students as shared owners of the learning experience. He reminded us that students need a seat at the table for buy-in and relevance. He echoed an important question he has heard music education scholar and teacher educator Bryan Powell frequently ask: "Are we preparing students for their future, or our past?"

Kevin asks his students, "What do you want to learn that we aren't learning yet? What do you want to do that we're not doing yet?" He champions a powerful formula for learning: "Agency + Autonomy = Authenticity." Kevin's unique choices during his undergraduate degree and throughout his teaching career illustrate that formula in action, empowering him and those he teaches to chart their path forward to a future they envision for themselves.

Spotlight on Cultural Ensembles

Shelman Miller and James Kendrick teach band and choir in Alabama and noticed that, although their school population included more than 30% Hispanic students, very few were enrolled in traditional band, choir, and orchestra classes. They wondered whether a mariachi ensemble would interest these students and connect better with the Hispanic community outside the school. After receiving a positive response from students, they wrote and secured a $20,000 grant from the Alabama Arts Education Initiative to purchase instruments and music and fund workshops featuring guest clinicians.

They faced many challenges in beginning the program. Shelman said, "I had to learn it from zero, and I had a lot of incorrect assumptions about mariachi music. . . . The students corrected me when I played the wrong type of music, and they are always quick to correct my Spanish!" Shelman and James struggled to find resources with flexible arrangements to accommodate nontraditional instrumentation based on the students' interests. They needed to build their network of experts and gain proficiency on new instruments and in new vocal styles. "I'm teaching myself the guitarron. I'm learning alongside my students," shared Shelman. James said, "As a classically trained choral director, shifting into the ornamented, improvisatory, and rhythmically fluid world of mariachi required continual learning and feedback." They both listen with and to their students and have built a program of which they can be proud.

Shelman and James have seen their commitment to their students' music-making reflected in community engagement. James shared, "For many students, this was the first time their culture was front and center in an academic setting." Shelman recognized the importance of exposing some students to a new culture and music. He emphasized, "And we want to do it right."

Columbia High School Mariachi Band performs for the community.

Their attitude toward their students has been, "If you want to learn it, we will find a way to do it." Their students respond positively and take ownership of their learning. Not only has the number of Hispanic students in the choir and band program increased, Shelman and James have noticed that the skill development in the mariachi ensemble transfers over to traditional ensembles. Student excitement and energy for music they connect with has increased energy and effort in the other ensembles. According to Shelman, "the impact on students has been unexpected and unmistakable."

When we asked Shelman what advice he would give to current undergraduate students, he laughed. "I wish I would've taken the strings proficiency class more seriously! You never know what you're going to need until you need it!" He shared that too often PK–12 teachers don't go "outside of the box" because it's not comfortable or safe, but "it's okay if we don't know what we're doing at the start."

The undergraduate degree is an ideal time to try new things and acquire skills that we don't already possess. He suggested that music teacher preparation programs focus more on building the skills of creativity and problem-solving in their students. He advocated for organizing smaller ensembles and inviting students to write flex arrangements for the instruments they have. If professors can give their students challenges outside the box, undergraduates can learn resourcefulness and grow their confidence to handle a variety of different situations, instead of just the traditional ones in which we may have the most experience.

Along with revising course offerings and hiring faculty with diverse cultural and musical backgrounds, James suggested interdisciplinary collaborations at the university level, where music faculty collaborate with faculty from cultural or language studies to create real-world teaching scenarios. He also advocated for normalizing nontraditional success. "Faculty must affirm that excellence in music education is not confined to traditional Western models. Let's showcase alumni who are innovating in community or culturally specific contexts." James's and Shelman's students are an example of the confidence and leadership that can flourish in culturally responsive learning environments that reflect and celebrate the diversity of the student body.

Spotlight on Popular Music Education

Danielle Collins spent ten years teaching traditional band and orchestra in California before her commitment to "saying yes to the students" led her into the world of popular music education. Her college cohort was required to study popular music education, but Danielle was against it at first. As a classically trained percussionist, she had zero experience with popular music. "I hadn't even ever played on a drumset," Danielle told us; "I knew from the start that I would be the least knowledgeable person in the room, and it was that fear of unfamiliar territory that kept me away initially."

She first introduced concepts through her jazz band, and the students responded immediately. They found singers interested in trying something new, they brought in music that they wanted to learn, solved issues of instrumentation, and wrote out parts for each other. Student interests varied greatly, from John Legend to K-pop. The program expanded as she kept her goal of "saying yes to the students" and allowing them to learn what they wanted. After a few short years, her class enrollment had tripled. Then, after a school change, she was teaching popular music exclusively, seeing eighteen bands of 9–15 students each playing a wide variety of genres. As her student leaders of the various ensembles took ownership of their ensembles, she was freer to give individual student instruction and support.

Danielle spoke with gratitude about her undergraduate experience but admitted there was not a single course at that time that prepared her for the specific skills of running a popular music program. She also asserted that courses were not what was most needed. She praised the attitudes and examples of her professors and directors. They impressed upon her the

M3 students perform a modern music concert.

ever-evolving landscape of music education. "There will always be shifts, and it's important to adapt and adjust."

She had one teacher who would share new technology with his students, and his modeling of keeping at the forefront of advancements in the profession stayed with her as she went out to teach. She shared, "Colleges don't need to teach their students all the things. Skills are always changing, and they should! The best thing colleges can do for their students is teach them to be lifelong learners so they can adapt to any circumstance."

What was Danielle's greatest resource as she navigated this new landscape? "Everyone else!" she laughed. "Admit what you don't know and find someone who does." She reached out to local specialists and kept asking questions. She shared two practical suggestions for music teacher preparation programs. One, explore possibilities of making genre-specific rather than instrument-specific pedagogy and methods courses, where music education students can develop competencies in instructing and rehearsing ensembles in a variety of genres. Two, spend time researching the community local to your university to reflect the local musical culture of that community. Ask the question "What does my community need?" As she has responded to her community and kept "saying yes," students have thrived as musicians and leaders.

Key Takeaways

Although these four teachers work in different parts of the country and teach different courses, some consistent themes emerged from these interviews. Partnering with students by inviting their collaboration in designing curriculum and experiences not only increases student buy-in and engagement but also allows teachers to be facilitators, provide more relevant instruction and leadership opportunities, and have more individual interactions with students, which in turn empowers more individual student success. All the teachers emphasized the importance of agency and autonomy. Giving students choices and letting them chart their own course enables their learning to take directions that they find meaningful.

The teachers we spotlighted echoed the College Music Society manifesto, *Transforming Music Study from Its Foundations*, by recognizing that music teacher educators cannot devise a program that teaches everything to everybody and prepares music teachers for all possible future needs. But each person we interviewed mentioned that, in addition to revising curriculum to include at least one class on modern music-making techniques, MTEs must focus on fostering future music educators' dispositions: creativity, adaptability, collaboration, awareness of industry trends, cultural interest and understanding, and an unwavering focus on student needs.

The teachers we interviewed found dispositions most impactful when modeled by their professors and directors and directly taught through creative curriculum. Assignments embedded throughout music education coursework can ignite disposition development. Imagine the growth that could come from doing a classroom instrument pop music cover in elementary music fundamentals class or writing a flex arrangement for the local middle school in a required techniques course.

The NAfME *Blueprint* suggests revising music education curriculum to be "more culturally sustaining, equitable, and reflective of the needs of schools and communities" and "embed[ding] topics related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access into music teacher education curricula." We invite educators everywhere to be proactive and intentional about finding authentic ways to make a difference in the lives of students by taking up NAfME's call to move our profession forward "in ways that are inspiring, impactful, and inclusive." No one has to do everything, but if we each did something, it would make a world of difference!

Questions to Consider

- How does my music program reflect the musical interests and culture around my school?
- How do my classes prepare me and my students for their musical future and not my musical past? How am I tracking and responding to music industry trends?
- How do I involve students in designing curriculum and leading musical experiences?
- How am I developing my own and my students' creativity, adaptability, cultural awareness, and humility?
- What new courses could my school offer students that would be relevant for them? What assignments could I add to my traditional music courses to expand the curriculum and develop important dispositions?

ERIN BAILEY is Assistant Professor of Music Education at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.

SHANE COLQUHOUN is Assistant Professor of Music Technology and Contemporary Musical Styles at Alabama State University in Montgomery and Chair of NAfME's Council for Innovations.

RHODA BERNARD AND JULIE DUTY

Preparing Tomorrow's Music Educators to Reach and Teach Every Student

In today's school ensembles, students with disabilities often sit alongside their nondisabled peers. The wide range of student learning schemes presents challenges to music educators, as well as to the college faculty who prepare them for their careers. How can music teacher educators effectively nurture the next generation of music teachers to reach and teach every student?

A great place to start is with peer mentoring and collaboration. When peer mentoring and collaboration are woven through ensemble rehearsals and performances, the players and singers become resources for one another, and everyone learns and grows. Two important elements that are critical to the success of peer mentoring and collaboration are a class culture that values teamwork and training for the mentors in peer teaching strategies.

While every setting is unique, the following two organizations provide examples of what effective peer mentoring and collaboration can look like in inclusive ensembles:

- United Sound, an organization with chapters throughout the United States, provides specialized adaptive curricular materials in music reading, music theory concepts, and instrument technique for their peer mentors. The mentors receive training in how to implement the materials, how to ask effective questions, and how to use hand-over-hand prompting and verbal cues. Speaking about United Sound, nondisabled college student Sara notes: "This organization not only gives college individuals teaching experiences with individuals with disabilities, but it also gives the new musicians goals to work toward, an atmosphere to create dreams to accomplish, and a springboard to expand their horizons and create connections with people in their community, which allows them to open up and blossom."
- Based in San Jose, California, SingAble is a multigenerational inclusive community choir where 40% of the singers self-identify as having a disability. All 90-minute SingAble meetings begin with training for nondisabled choristers in disability advocacy, inclusive communication, and peer support strategies. The nondisabled singers then assist their choirmates with disabilities during the rehearsal. They use adaptive lyric sheets with symbols and arrows to learn parts; they sing for and with each other; they teach each other American Sign Language-interpreted song lyrics; and they read standard musical notation together. The mother of one of the singers calls SingAble "a magical program that opened up access for my autistic child to experience choir at a young age, develop her musical and social interactions in a fun way, and establish positive interactions with others."

Peer mentoring and collaboration benefit every student, not just those with disabilities. Some of the benefits include:

United Sound mentors and new musician from Elkhart, Indiana, preparing for rehearsal.

United Sound musicians celebrate from the stage in Mesa, Arizona.

When peer mentoring and collaboration are woven through ensemble rehearsals and performances, the players and singers become resources for one another, and everyone learns and grows.

- Developing a community where members of the ensemble work together and help one another *fosters a positive and productive learning environment for everyone.*
- Working in multiple configurations (large group, small groups, pairs) *helps students engage and learn more effectively.*
- Creating a student-centered environment where ensemble members lead and contribute materials *provides learners with the opportunity to shine.*
- Offering occasions for guided student choice *increases learners' ownership and motivation.*

Interested in implementing peer mentoring and collaboration in your ensemble? Try the following strategies:

- **Engage smaller configurations:** Match more experienced students with less experienced students in small groups of two to four. The more experienced players assist their peers in learning and playing their parts. Students will come to see themselves as leaders and will learn that collaboration is an important part of being in a musical ensemble.
- **Create adapted parts:** Simplify parts so that less experienced students can play at their level and contribute authentically to the piece. When possible, ask more experienced students to write these parts for themselves or their classmates. Rather than being the only desired form of participation, the standard parts come to be seen as points of departure that can be adapted so that all students can rehearse and perform together. Playing as an ensemble becomes the priority, rather than executing the standard parts as written.
- **Develop new warmups and practice materials:** Encourage students to design and teach their own exercises that address some of the challenges that their peers encounter. Students will come to view warm-ups and practice materials as teaching tools that provide valuable preparation for playing or singing specific repertoire.

Peer mentoring and collaboration are essential practices for music educators looking to enhance their inclusive teaching approaches. When learners support one another and work together, they create the conditions for the magic of ensemble music education to unfold. Every person has the opportunity to learn, students develop leadership skills, and, most importantly, the ensemble becomes a generous, creative community where everyone plays and sings together.

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Peer-to-peer teaching is central to the United Sound process.

Simple accommodations like the rhythmic food flash cards pictured here, help to make abstract concepts concrete.

To connect with United Sound about creating a collegiate chapter, go to *https://www.unitedsound.org/college*. To learn more about SingAble, go to *https://resoundingachord.org/singable/*. For more resources about accessible music education, check out the Berklee Institute for Accessible Arts Education at *https://college.berklee.edu/BIAAE*.

SHANE COLQUHOUN AND
SONYA WHITE HOPE

A Case for Evolving Music Teacher Preparation Programs

Preservice music teachers' inspiration is often brimming with heartfelt memories and visceral experiences from school choirs, bands, and orchestras. Eager to join their mentors, undergraduate students devote hours to completing voice-leading exercises, discerning philosophical differences between Orff and Kodály, and refining lesson plans. These students leave our institutions musically proficient and optimistic about making a positive impact on the world. Most contemporary programs prepare preservice music teachers (PMTs) for careers aligned with current conservatory offerings. However, how will music education programs prepare PMTs who are called to teach from nontraditional vantages, such as the evolving music industry, music from outside the Western canon, and more?

A Dilemma

Given that many PMTs' backgrounds and university programs do not adequately prepare them to teach PK–12 students who aspire to careers such as studio manager, music producer, sound engineer, and other adjacent music professions, what sorts of educators and education might evolve from music teacher preparation programs that equip professionals to introduce students to alternative pathways in music? Similarly, scholars have tasked the academy with expanding "the path to the profession by cultivating and strengthening more inclusive and equitable processes" and encouraged us to cultivate well-prepared teachers who are steeped in cultural competence, creativity, and relevance, and who are connected to their communities in meaningful ways (see NAfME's *Blueprint for Strengthening the Music Teacher Profession*).

We assert that broadening the scope and curriculum of music teacher education can better engage diverse interests among PK–12 students, support career readiness, and reflect the evolving landscape of music.

Possibilities for the Future

The Music Professions Index, developed by the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music, identifies more than 75 music-related careers. These careers fall into nine broad categories: performance, composition, technology, retail and musical products, industry, administration, writing, and education.[1] This diversity underscores the need to reframe how we prepare future music educators to think about all the possibilities in music.

PMTs' traditional training often focuses on performance, overlooking the creative aspects of music and the profession's vocational dimensions. Yet there are countless ways for PK–12 students to engage with music, both inside and outside the classroom. Music teacher preparation programs reflecting this broader landscape should encourage PMTs to consider music making as a 21st-century activity and adopt a global perspective that recognizes their students' musical tastes and cultural knowledge as assets. Lifelong musicianship, from a continuum of perspectives, should be our goal.

Ensuring Success

PK–12 music education programs must engage all students, including those whose talents, skills, and interests highlight nontraditional ensembles and approaches to music-making, with respect and commitment. Implications for such a transition pose exciting opportunities for professional development among music teacher educators and licensing and accrediting bodies. Re-envisioning relationships among community members would

become a guiding beacon. Said another way, just as jazz study was once considered an anathema to professional music scholarship, it now enjoys a place of privilege in many elite institutions. Music education programs providing students high-quality experiences in nontraditional music contexts will likely remain relevant as our collective futures unfold.

Connecting with local and global music professionals can also provide PMTs with insights into all aspects of the music industry and authentic artistic approaches in nontraditional music careers. These interactions can inform how music education better serves students with diverse musical interests and experiences.

A Broader Scope

We suggest that music teacher preparation programs broaden their scope to remain relevant and sustainable. Incorporating industry practices, entrepreneurship, and 21st-century literacies into curricula will prepare PMTs to lead in evolving educational and cultural contexts. By embracing content creation, branding, and modern technology, we empower future educators to connect meaningfully with students and thrive in today's dynamic music landscape.

Broadening the scope and curriculum of music teacher education can better engage diverse interests among PK–12 students, support career readiness, and reflect the evolving landscape of music.

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PHILLIP M. HASH

Supporting the Mental Health of Preservice Music Teachers

Preservice music teachers (PMTs) face many challenges in completing an undergraduate degree and attaining teaching licensure. Some might occasionally or often feel overwhelmed by the requirements, responsibilities, and daily pressures involved in the major. These pressures might lead to decreased mental health in the form of anxiety or depression and reduce their ability to function and interact with others. Preservice music educators and college/university faculty can work together to mitigate these challenges in several ways.

Mental Health and Stress

Mental health is determined by a person's overall well-being and functioning. It is closely related to their ability to manage and recover from adversity, solve daily problems, and cope when things are difficult or stressful. A complex interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, and environmental factors influences mental health. As a result, specific causes for an individual's mental health challenges can be difficult to determine.

Psychological health is a key component for success in college. Recent research, however, indicates that many students experience mental health challenges in one form or another and that this phenomenon is increasing on campuses throughout the country. The 2022–2023 Healthy Minds Study of 76,406 undergraduate and graduate students in the United States indicated that 41% felt symptoms of depression, 36% experienced anxiety, and 14% had seriously considered suicide.

Nearly all college students encounter challenges from life experiences, finances, physical ailments, personal relationships, and problematic social, political, or workplace conditions. Students in the arts, however, are more likely to struggle with mental health issues compared to their peers in other fields. Music education majors in particular report high levels of stress, depression, and anxiety.

So, what's going on? A lot of it might come down to the unique challenges of studying music. Performance anxiety, perfectionism, and concerns about future careers are just the beginning. Music students also face constant public judgment, tough competition, high expectations, and critical feedback. A recent survey by Hash and Greer (see sidebar) found that "achieving musical success" and "perception of musical ability" were the top two stressors among the undergraduate music majors in the sample.

Most music education majors must also complete field work before student teaching and might spend much time and money traveling to and working in schools. These experiences can also be stressful as PMTs learn to plan lessons, implement complex pedagogies, interact with PK–12 students, and manage the classroom. PMTs' schedules can be intense; some carry course loads of 18 or more credit hours, participate in multiple ensembles, and work at least one job just to make ends meet. In short, being a music education major can be incredibly rewarding, but also mentally and emotionally demanding.

Recommendations for Students

The demands of the major might cause preservice teachers to neglect their mental and physical well-being. Fortunately, there are several ways music education majors can maintain their mental health and deal with stress.

Time Management: PMTs can reduce stress and improve mental health by guarding their time and saying no when necessary. They should think carefully about their capacity to handle additional responsibilities before enrolling in classes, lessons, or ensembles they might want to take but are not required for the music education program. PMTs should also avoid procrastination and make a schedule for practice, homework, meals, exercise, and sleep. They should plan to complete longer assignments over several days or weeks rather than waiting to start right before the deadline. This routine will help PMTs stay on track and avoid feeling

overwhelmed. Missing deadlines and getting behind adds stress and might cause a student to shut down and eventually fail classes, experience unsuccessful performances, and miss professional goals.

Social and Emotional Support: Music education majors spend a lot of time isolated in a practice room or studying for a heavy courseload, which might result in minimal time for socializing. Experts recommend building emotional connections and strong social support networks to buffer stress. Whereas a lack of personal relationships is linked to higher stress levels, positive connections with others can help maintain mental well-being. Many PMTs will likely have peer groups of fellow music majors due to the time they spend together. They might find it beneficial, however, to seek community through clubs, teams, religious organizations, or volunteer opportunities outside of the department of music.

Competition within the music department can lead to feelings of inadequacy due to the strong connection between feedback from others and music self-concept. When possible, PMTs should avoid people who are unsupportive or contribute to conflict. It is much healthier to walk away than to engage in negative interactions.

Digital Wellness: Digital wellness for music education majors is essential for reducing stress and maintaining mental health. Although technology can support communication and connections with others, constant use of smartphones can lead to digital overload from excessive screen time and distractions. Social media is designed to maintain one's attention and encourage repetitive use. Some internet sites that support video might be especially damaging for music majors if they constantly compare their musicianship with seemingly virtuoso peers worldwide. This activity can increase anxiety or depression if it results in feelings of inadequacy and reduced music self-concept.

Reducing screen exposure can lead to better rest and relaxation. Tips for reducing screen time include turning off or limiting phone notifications, scheduling times to tune in and tune out, and putting the phone away during meals or when spending time with others. College students can also curate their social media by following only accounts posting useful and enjoyable content and muting those that increase anxiety or frustration.

Physical Health: The schedule of a music education major might cause a decline in physical health due to a lack of exercise and poor nutrition. Movement and fitness activities such as jogging, swimming, or dancing can improve physical well-being and promote good mental health. The Center for Disease Control recommends 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity exercise and two days of strength training, starting with low-impact activities such as walking or biking if you are less active. Yoga classes can also be beneficial in lowering blood pressure and heart rate and increasing chemicals in the brain that are linked to improved mood and stress regulation.

In addition to an active lifestyle, music education majors should strive to maintain a nutritious diet. Stress can lead to overeating and poor dietary choices in the form of ultra-processed foods and sugar, which may exacerbate poor mental health. PMTs can reduce caffeine intake, which may increase anxiety and disrupt sleep, by considering healthier alternatives such as matcha and herbal teas. Finally, teacher candidates should resist the temptation to use alcohol and other controlled substances to reduce stress. These substances are illegal for many college students and not effective for maintaining long-term physical or mental health.

Adequate sleep is also important for maintaining psychological well-being. Poor sleep can negatively impact mental health by contributing to conditions like anxiety, depression, and stress. A lack of restful sleep can impair the brain's ability to process emotions

Preservice Music Teachers' Mental Health Checklist

Time Management

- ☐ Say no to extra commitments that increase stress.
- ☐ Avoid procrastination.
- ☐ Stick to a routine for homework, practice, meals, exercise, and sleep.

Social & Emotional Support

- ☐ Build supportive relationships inside and outside the music department.
- ☐ Get involved in clubs, religious groups, teams, or volunteer opportunities.
- ☐ Limit contact with negative or unsupportive individuals.

Digital Wellness

- ☐ Reduce screen time, especially social media scrolling.
- ☐ Turn off unneeded phone notifications.
- ☐ Follow only uplifting or inspiring content; mute anxiety-inducing accounts.

Physical Health

- ☐ Exercise regularly.
- ☐ Eat nutritious foods and avoid ultra-processed snacks.
- ☐ Reduce caffeine; avoid alcohol and controlled substances.
- ☐ Maintain a consistent sleep schedule and bedtime routine.

and cope with stress and heighten feelings of irritability, anxiety, and sadness. To foster good sleep habits, PMTs should establish a consistent sleep schedule and create a calming bedtime routine. Those who have trouble falling asleep or experience frequent disruptions during the night can contact campus health services for guidance on safe and effective treatments that may help.

Recommendations for College and University Faculty

College and university music faculty can help promote good mental health among their PMTs. Faculty and administrators must understand that music education majors face unique pressures, including performance anxiety, career concerns, and demanding schedules. To support students, music schools should create a welcoming environment that encourages personal growth rather than competition. Freshmen courses or periodic workshops during the semester could provide strategies for coping with stress, managing time, and addressing physical and mental health. Faculty and staff can support PMTs by discussing the importance of mental health, understanding students' in- and out-of-school responsibilities, and modeling ways to set appropriate boundaries to support psychological well-being.

> ***Students in the arts, however, are more likely to struggle with mental health issues compared to their peers in other fields. Music education majors in particular report high levels of stress, depression, and anxiety.***

In addition to emotional support, universities can help PMTs manage academic pressures by looking for ways to reduce course loads and streamline curricula. This process will involve determining which courses are essential and eliminating unnecessary overlaps. Faculty might also rethink ensemble requirements if students spend excessive time in multiple groups. Ensembles often receive only one credit but require three or more hours per week.

Hidden credits, such as prerequisites that do not count toward the degree, zero credit classes such as recital/concert attendance, or expectations by individual faculty that are not part of the official curriculum, might add unnecessarily to the program. Faculty should accept students' decisions to opt out of a non-required performance or professional growth opportunity to maintain their mental health.

Instructors should also be aware of the total program and limit homework to what a student can reasonably complete along with other responsibilities. Faculty could work together to ensure that exams and larger projects do not happen simultaneously in multiple classes and for a particular group of students.

Advisors can guide PMTs in making choices about non-required electives and extracurricular activities and exploring options for extending time in college, if needed, to avoid burnout. Faculty and advisors should also try to be aware of students who might be struggling with mental health and ensure they have access to counseling services and other support from professionals on campus.

Mental Health Is Essential

Good mental health is essential for success in a music teacher education program and later in the PK–12 classroom. Preservice teachers must proactively work to maintain their mental well-being by reducing stress, managing their time, and fostering positive relationships. In a June 2019 issue of *Music Educators Journal* titled "Health and Wellness for In-Service and Future Music Teachers: Developing a Self-Care Plan," Christa Kuebel recommended that preservice teachers evaluate their self-care routine and develop a plan to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The tools and activities suggested in that article and the others listed in the Suggested Reading sidebar could be a good starting place for music education majors and faculty to work together to improve mental health among the student body.

Suggested Reading

These articles provide additional ideas for maintaining psychological well-being as well as surveys/inventories for evaluating and reflecting on personal mental health.

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A Preliminary Research Agenda for the Music Teacher Pipeline

BY CARLOS R. ABRIL, COLLEEN CONWAY, PHILLIP M. HASH, WENDY SIMS, ANN MARIE STANLEY

Robust research is critical for guiding meaningful actions to strengthen the music teaching profession. Identifying significant challenges and posing targeted questions set the stage for a purposeful research agenda, clarifying where the greatest need for inquiry lies.

Members of the Music Teacher Profession Advisory Committee offer ideas for research on the four phases of the teacher pipeline: (1) recruiting, (2) navigating admissions and auditions, (3) preparing future teachers, and (4) supporting them in the field. While not exhaustive, this preliminary research agenda highlights pressing questions. Research-based answers to these questions can shape policies, practices, and innovation across the music teaching profession.

Recruiting and Inspiring Future Music Educators

Recruiting enough music educators to address current shortages has become increasingly difficult. Barriers such as financial inequities, narrow audition requirements, and state certification mandates underscore the need for systemic change. Many underrepresented students, including those from small/rural schools, lack resources and diverse role models, further discouraging them from pursuing music education as a career. Answers to these research questions can inform and improve recruitment:

- How and why do teachers successfully identify and nurture future music teachers among their students?
- What arguments, materials, and platforms are most effective in shaping/reshaping perceptions of music teaching as a viable career?
- Which mentorship strategies most effectively connect diverse and interested high school students with music educator mentors, and how do these strategies influence their career aspirations?
- What characterizes university outreach programs or partnerships that attract diverse students to music education degree programs?

Navigating Admissions and Auditions

The admissions/auditions phase is a critical gateway to determining who enters the music teaching profession. Traditional requirements can significantly

impact access, diversity, and the future teaching workforce. As schools face persistent teacher shortages, reevaluating and reimagining these entry pathways has become increasingly urgent. Key research questions include:

- How do traditional performance-based requirements affect music education preparation programs' accessibility and diversity?
- What is the relationship between admission criteria and eventual teaching effectiveness?
- How can institutions uphold standards while expanding pathways for promising future educators?
- How do current audition processes impact applicants' decision-making and professional identity?
- How can alternative approaches better identify teaching potential?

Preparing Music Teachers

Significant gaps remain in how music teacher preparation programs address the evolving demands of PK–12 education. Despite ongoing initiatives and reforms, questions persist about aligning curricula with real-world teaching contexts, ensuring equitable access, and promoting preservice teacher well-being. Additional inquiry can shed light on critical areas such as curriculum design, licensure requirements, alternative pathways, and well-being. Pressing research questions include:

- How can programs effectively integrate diverse musical genres and their teaching methods to meet PK–12 needs?
- What impact do alternative pathways (e.g., community college partnerships) have on accessibility and diversity in music teacher preparation?
- How do certification exams/portfolios influence the success of prospective music teachers?
- Which strategies best address well-being and mitigate stress in demanding teacher preparation programs?

Supporting and Retaining Music Teachers

Even thorough teacher preparation programs cannot account for every potential teaching context. Effective induction, mentoring, and sustained support are critical for both new and experienced music teachers. Although a body of research has highlighted the benefits of music-focused professional development, the changing nature of schools and schooling and the diverse learning needs of teachers and students demand deeper study. The following research questions can guide further inquiry:

Effective induction, mentoring, and sustained support are critical for both new and experienced music teachers.

- How do we support new teachers when they begin working in school settings that differ from their experiences as PK–12 students and student teaching?
- How can NAfME and state MEAs develop programs and materials to support new teachers in their communities?
- What role do affinity groups play in supporting new and experienced teachers?
- How do the professional development needs of music teachers change throughout their careers?

We hope this agenda sparks discussion and guides future inquiries, recognizing that rigorous, collaborative research can drive meaningful progress and strengthen the music teacher pipeline.

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ROB LYDA AND SCOTT SHEEHAN

Surviving and Thriving During Your First Five Years of Teaching

The education landscape has changed drastically since we began teaching at the turn of the 21st century. At that time, the use of technology in education was still relatively new and largely limited to email. The most reliable forms of communication were the landline and printed newsletters. *Essential Elements for Band* had not yet had 2000 added to the title, and Dr. Tim was just a few years older than we are now. We began teaching before the rise of music education influencers on social media; access to online resources and media to support us was limited at the start of our careers.

Despite these circumstances, there was a sense of hopefulness about what music education could become for both teachers and students, as outlined in *Vision 2020*. We eagerly entered the music education profession before the No Child Left Behind Act, and the "new" standards were from 1994. We were excited to be joining the greatest profession, music education. A lot has changed over our 25+ years in education, but many of the fundamental hallmarks of teaching and especially the excitement of teaching students remain the same.

As we began discussing what this article could and should be, we quickly agreed that we didn't want it to be "two old guys imparting wisdom." This is not a 2025 version of Statler and Waldorf sitting in a velvet-lined balcony offering colorful commentary. Our early career experiences—though geographically different—had a lot in common. We both started our careers as band directors; Scott is still a band director, and Rob is now a general music teacher. We reflected on the struggles of early teaching, as well as the feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction that came from our early successes. We could each recall specific moments, colleagues, students, and challenges that helped shape us into the educators we are today. We can both vividly remember the joy we both found in teaching during our early careers.

This article is not a list of our top tips for a successful career. Instead, we wanted to explore what it truly means to be a successful early career music educator in *today's* educational climate. We reached out to music education leaders across the country and asked them to recommend early career music educators—those in their first five years of teaching—who are thriving and who might be willing to share their experiences and ideas.

Drawing on our own experiences and the insights outlined in the *Blueprint for Strengthening the Music Teaching Profession*, we identified five questions to explore from the perspective of early career

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The ability to reflect on both our own experiences, the needs and experiences of our students, and the experiences of our colleagues is a powerful tool in our growth as music educators.


Gabriella Alvarez-Barajas


Rodnalyn Sese


Irene Guggenheim-Triana


Julia Turner


Justin Bruss

educators. What follows are the responses of 12 music educators from around the country, teaching at various levels, in different specialty areas, and in diverse geographic locations.

What's the Most Important Thing You've Learned Since You Started Teaching?

Experience is often the best teacher. When we leave college, we have been given a lot of ideas about how to think and apply information. Many of us are eager to put all of our knowledge to use with real live students. We can't wait to have experience.

Schools reflect our communities and the broader society. We are often confronted with balancing our students' experiences with our experiences and learning how to be a teacher. It's easy to assume that our own experiences in education are shared by everyone. However, the ability to reflect on both our own experiences, the needs and experiences of our students, and the experiences of our colleagues is a powerful tool in our growth as music educators.

"Looking back on my first year, I wish I had spent more time reflecting—not only with colleagues, but also with my mentor and my students. One of the most valuable lessons I've learned this year is the importance of student reflection. When students are given a voice, they take greater ownership of their learning and feel a sense of pride in their work because they are actively shaping their own educational experience."
Gabriella Alvarez-Barajas, Las Cruces High School, Las Cruces, New Mexico

"Showing up for [students] as a human being first. I've learned that my role isn't just about teaching music but using music as a vehicle to help students feel seen, capable, and confident in their voice both on and off their instruments."
Rodnalyn Sese, San Diego Unified Elementary Schools, San Diego, California

"Experiment with different systems to find out what works for you. This applies to all aspects of your work—personal organization, rehearsal space procedures, classroom management, rehearsal planning. What works for your colleagues might not necessarily work for you, and vice versa. You do not have to wait for a new semester, a new year, a new concert cycle, or any more formalized beginning to try something new."
Irene Guggenheim-Triana, Springbrook High School, White Oak, Maryland

"It is so important to build a village of colleagues, friends, and family to support you. In my first year of teaching, I did not think that I needed to ask for help from my coworkers when putting on music events at my school. Since I began delegating and asking for help, I can better focus on serving my students, directing the musical components, and leave feeling satisfied instead of overstimulated!"
Julia Turner, A.C. Moore Elementary School, Columbia, South Carolina

"Patience."
Justin Bruss, Kūlanihāko'i High School, Kihei, Hawaii

How Do You Create a Positive and Engaging Classroom Culture?

A popular piece of advice often given to early career teachers is: "Don't smile until second semester." We've always found that advice to be both disturbing and odd. Why would anyone want to present themselves as unwelcoming and unfriendly? As veteran educator Rita Pierson famously said, "Kids don't learn from people they don't like."

Of course, the reality is that students will, unfortunately, learn many lessons from people they don't like. However, they *need* teachers who actively work to create a sense of community and belonging in and outside of the classroom. Music should be the best part of the day. The music classroom should always be the place where all students are welcome, actively fosters community, and


Antonio Posey


Natalie Hensley


Michealla Bailey


Abraham Gomez


Anna Flynn


Caroline East


Ashley La-Nolasco

offers opportunities for self-expression, student choice, meaningful connection, and belonging.

Building rapport with students, families, and colleagues is an essential component of creating a healthy and positive classroom environment.

"Students will see through a façade, and though there are barriers that you have to create in this profession, you have to be who you are in the classroom, hallway, or in your interactions. Then you must have a love for what you do, we all can think of a teacher who was just getting a paycheck or checking a box. Do you want to be seen as that teacher?"
Antonio Posey, Riverside High School, Decaturville, Tennessee

"Despite working at three schools and having more than 400 students in my first few years teaching, I made it a habit to learn every student's name."
Natalie Hensley, Washington Middle School, Bakersfield, California

"I try my best to make sure my students know and feel that I care about them past the band room. Every day when I start class, I ask students if they have any good things to share, and this allows them to tell me anything and everything and is mostly non-band related. I learn something new every day and I usually check up on them the next day about those good things. I try to go and support them in their sports and other extra-curricular programs and interests when I can."

Michealla Bailey, Zia Middle School, Mesilla, New Mexico

"I push the idea of community to the students. Students should feel that they own their learning and that the classroom is theirs. In the sense of a community, students feel that they must help not only themselves but those around them as well."

Abraham Gomez, Mesa Middle School, Las Cruces, New Mexico

"I believe we're not meant to be alone. Music is meant to be shared. It's one of the few things that lets us express who we are and connect deeply with others at the same time. I try to create a space that is communal and creates a sense of belonging."

Rodnalyn Sese

Who's On Your Team?

Developing confidence and accomplishment for early career teachers comes from being aligned with your expectations for the job and the reality you face every day in your music classroom. These feelings often are strengthened through affirmation from coworkers and administrators along with friends and family. Forming relationships built on trust and collaboration is essential for developing a sense of connection and belonging and also assists with job satisfaction and longevity in the profession.

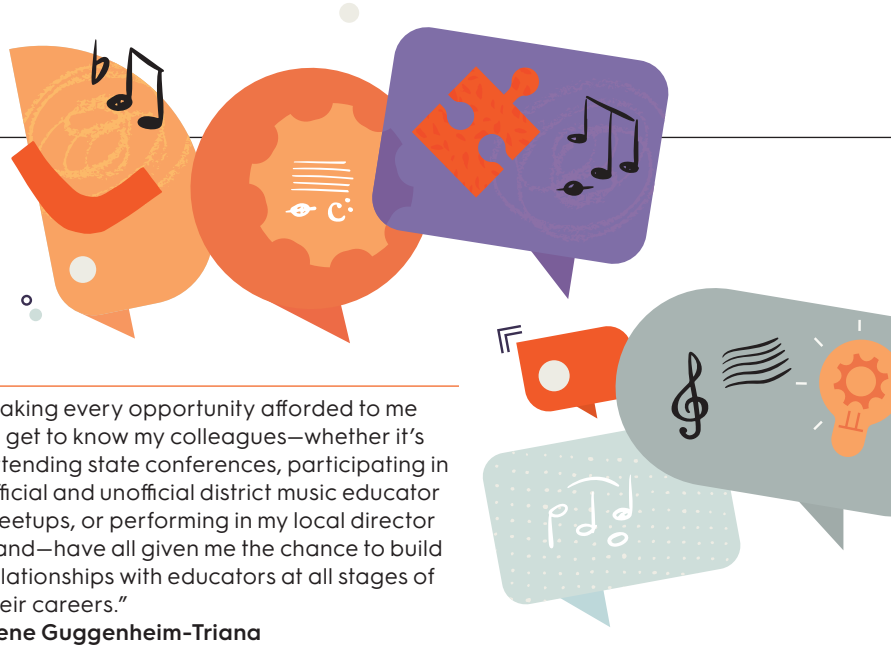
Whether a music colleague, a guidance counselor, a cafeteria worker, your principal, the social studies teacher, or the building secretary, finding the people in your school who support you and your daily work is paramount. You can also stay connected with your mentors and college professors for practical advice and how-to strategies as you navigate your first few years of teaching. Growing your circle of influence can also come from cultivating relationships with families, community members, leaders in your MEA and NAfME, industry partners, local business leaders, politicians, and legislators. You are more likely to feel like you are thriving and satisfied with your job when you have the resources, knowledge, and skills to effectively lead your students toward musical growth. Remember that no one is alone in our profession and there is always someone on your team to help.

"I am the only instrumental music teacher in my school, but I have a great specialist team of art, gym, music, and media teachers!"

Anna Flynn, Montgomery County Public Schools, Takoma Park, Maryland

"[My colleagues] are overwhelmingly supportive and have built me up in my first year of teaching. Every new teacher deserves a support team or at least one person who is a champion for them."
Caroline East, Gardendale High School, Gardendale, Alabama

"It's easy to feel isolated or misunderstood in a specialized role, but when you approach others with the mindset that we're all here for the students, it opens the door to meaningful collaboration and a stronger sense of community."
Ashley La-Nolasco, Mt. Rainier High School, Des Moines, Washington



How Do You Connect with Your Colleagues and Community?

Relationships are strengthened by taking the time to truly understand someone else's perspective. To do this, you need to understand their ideas, goals, beliefs, and culture. Consider the time you put into getting to know your community and colleagues as an investment into your program that also benefits you as a leader and educator. The more we know how other people in our school communities think and why they make the decisions they do, the more we can be effective in gaining support for our students and our music programs. You must be willing to listen and learn and, as Steven Covey says, seek to understand before being understood. You cannot underestimate the feeling of belonging and value that comes from being connected to a collaborative school community.

"Taking every opportunity afforded to me to get to know my colleagues—whether it's attending state conferences, participating in official and unofficial district music educator meetups, or performing in my local director band—have all given me the chance to build relationships with educators at all stages of their careers."
Irene Guggenheim-Triana

"My school often hosts faculty bonding activities, such as happy hours, holiday parties, and group fitness classes. I make sure to attend those events to better connect with my colleagues outside of work."
Julia Turner

"We have weekly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) where we can discuss different teaching strategies, expectations for students and concert etiquette, how to order supplies, and so forth. During these PLCs, we also have the tendency to check in with each other and touch base on how everyone is doing. We all end up very tight knit and are always willing to help each other out whenever we can."
Natalie Hensley

"Beyond the school, we work to promote our program's achievements by sharing news and accolades through local media outlets, participating in public events, and maintaining a strong presence on social media. The community will care if they are aware!"
Antonio Posey

How Do You Keep Work–Life Balance?

Maintaining our mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing is critical to be our best for our students. Our students' musical growth and success is a reflection of how we take care of ourselves. For far too long our profession has held the notion that those who are the busiest and put in the most hours are the most successful. The music educators who fare the best maintain a healthy balance between work, their own musical pursuits, and time with family and friends, and prioritize their health and happiness. There is wisdom in the idea of doing all things in moderation!

"I have tried to create some of the following boundaries/rules for myself to help me strive for work-life balance: Once I leave work, I try to not let it follow me home. I am conscious of extra time and responsibilities I take on in and outside of work. I allow myself to take off if I feel sick or unwell. I won't answer school or parent emails after 5 p.m. unless urgent. I set my phone to Do Not Disturb after 7 p.m. I remind myself that saying no is okay sometimes."
Michealla Bailey

"I value having hobbies that are completely unrelated to music to help me recharge and bring balance to my life. Lately, these include baking, fitness, and reading."
Gabriella Alvarez-Barajas

"I enjoy making music with friends, sharing meals, and having honest conversations that help me ground myself. Balance isn't about perfect schedules. It is about nurturing that safe space within myself, staying connected to community, and remembering my boundaries."
Rodnalyn Sese

"I remind myself that I have 40 years until retirement—there's no need to do everything right now. I just need to keep growing."
Ashley La-Nolasco

All Can Help Contribute

As members of the Music Teaching Profession Advisory Committee, we are committed to helping our early career colleagues remain in the profession as engaged and productive members. We believe the music teaching profession is large enough to make room for all people and all types of music. Together, we can build a music education community that creates opportunities for everyone and embraces all forms of music education.

If you are an experienced music educator, we encourage you to seek out early career music educators. Make them feel welcome, open doors for their growth in the profession, and involve them in meaningful work within your MEAs. All of us were once new to the music teaching profession. You could be an early career music educator's lifeline and the mentor who helps them stay in the profession. It is our duty and obligation to support and encourage the next generation of music educators.

If you are an early career music educator, we encourage you to explore and engage with the resources and programs offered by your MEA and NAfME. Find a seasoned music educator to talk with, share ideas, and engage in meaningful mentorship and professional development. Teaching is hard but meaningful work, and it is always better when you have a community that supports and encourages you. We look forward to seeing the ways you will blossom in your career and eventually reflect on how you can support the next generation of early career music educators.

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COLLEEN CONWAY AND SCOTT SHEEHAN

Systems of Support for Teachers in the First Five Years

Malte Mueller / fStop / Getty Images

Suggestions for New Music Teachers

Know the teacher support policies in your school, community, and state. Many schools provide a building-level mentor who can be helpful for understanding the micropolitics and policies of the school beyond the music classroom. Some districts provide music mentors from your schools or other schools in the district. A few states have statewide new teacher programs that are required. Many state MEAs and local organizations offer music teacher support systems. Talk with your college professors about what is available in your state and community, and contact your MEA if you are new to a state.

Be proactive in reaching out to your mentors. Get to know your music mentors, whether they are in music, a non-music area, your building, or your MEA. All of them aim to support you in your early years.

Build a community with other teachers who are in their first five years. Studies suggest that other early career teachers can be a valuable system of support, as they are experiencing some of the same issues you are.

Video record your teaching so you can share with those working to assist you. It is impossible to talk about teaching and learning if you cannot see it. There will be moments you would not rather record, and those are often the most important!

Suggestions for Building and School District Mentors

Be proactive in establishing the relationship. Simply suggesting "Hey, I am here if you need me" is not enough. Set up regular in-person or virtual interactions to get to know your mentee and to stay in touch.

Share your current teaching challenges with your mentee. Let your mentee know about the things you are working on in your own teaching. Every year of teaching offers new challenges, and you can best provide a strong support system for an early career teacher if you are collaborating on shared issues and not perceived by your mentee as trying to "teach" them.

View a video of the teaching or visit the classroom of your mentee. Research suggests that mentors need to see the teaching and learning environment to be helpful. So, watch videos together of your mentee's teaching or visit their classroom if logistics allow. Listen more than you speak in these interactions and think developmentally about how to help the teacher progress.

Suggestions for Mentor Program Coordinators

Mentor preparation is a key factor in mentor program success. Just because someone is a good music teacher does not mean they will be a good mentor to an early career teacher. Mentor development is the first step in securing a strong support system for early career teachers.

Digital mentoring is a solid option for teacher support. Studies have shown that digital mentoring, such as through Zoom, email, or texting, is often perceived as helpful for teachers, and this model removes many of the barriers to in-person interactions.

Support for the first five years. Work to create support systems that go beyond the first year or two and acknowledge the growth of the early career teacher in the supports provided.

For additional mentoring resources, please go to:

bit.ly/NAfMEMusicEdMentor

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JOSHUA PALKKI

Finding Your People: The Power of Affinity Groups for Music Educators

If we don't feel belonging, it turns out we can learn to feel it because it's wired into us. Through evolution, our ancestors developed this innate sense of connection in order to survive. . . . Human beings are expertly adapted for connection and cooperation.

– Sebene Selassie, *You Belong: A Call for Connection*

One of the most important pieces of advice I received as a future teacher was to "find my people." My undergraduate music education professors taught me to connect with the many people who could help me navigate my first years of teaching—administrators, custodial staff, office staff, parents, and fellow music teachers in the area. While these connections were helpful and important, as a new teacher I still felt disconnected. As a 22-year-old gay teacher, I struggled mightily to integrate my queer identity with my professional teacher identity. I had an idea that being a professional educator meant being predominantly focused on the process of music making to create a strong performance.

In approaching my classroom and my students this way, I neglected the deeply human endeavor that is choral singing. This disconnect prevented me from being the kind of authentic teacher that I thought I would be. If I had been able to connect in a meaningful way with other queer music teachers, my early years in the middle and high school choral classroom could have been more successful. In other words, I wish that I had been part of an affinity group.

Yuichiro Chino / Moment / Getty Images

Affinity groups, according to professors Aaron M. Glassman and Myron Glassman, are "typically based on common interests such as age, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. However, they can be based on any characteristic, e.g., single parenthood, which brings [people] together to share common concerns, address common problems, and provide camaraderie and fellowship."[1] Affinity groups are sometimes confused with special interest groups (SIGs), which focus on a shared topic, discipline, or area of interest, often within a professional or academic context. String teachers who gather at a state music education conference, for example, could be considered a SIG. Affinity groups, on the other hand, are primarily focused on shared identity, lived experiences, or personal characteristics.

As indicated by the quote from Sebene Selassie above, we as humans seek places to belong; we are wired for connection. Young teachers can feel disconnected and isolated in their first years of teaching. After spending time in a school or department of music—surrounded by fellow musicians, music teacher educators, and future music educators—the daily reality of teaching in a PK–12 school with only one or two (or maybe even zero) music colleagues can feel very isolating. Part of this isolation may involve working alongside colleagues and administrators who do not understand what music teachers do. I once had an administrator tell me in my debrief after a formal teaching observation that she loved visiting my class because we just "had fun" in class. I explained to her that a lot of teaching and learning occurred while the students were having fun.

Some of the reasons for a disconnect between music teachers and colleagues and administrators include but are not limited to the fact that (a) professional development for teachers often does not apply to music educators, (b) music teachers often have larger classes than teachers in other subject areas, (c) music is not a tested subject, and (d) music teachers often are responsible for producing public performances. The sense of isolation that teachers who have recently completed their undergraduate training often feel may cause them to rethink being a teacher. An affinity group might be a good option for a teacher experiencing this type of isolation.

Within affinity groups, members can validate one another's experiences, offer culturally responsive mentorship, and share strategies for navigating professional spaces that may not always feel inclusive. Over time, this sense of community can foster resilience, confidence, and a deeper sense of belonging within the profession.

An affinity group can offer a culture of safety for music teachers in their first few years of teaching, and can be a powerful tool for empowering those who may feel "othered" in music education spaces or those who are from historically marginalized populations. When I enter a room of other queer people, for example, there is a shared experience that makes me immediately feel at ease. Within affinity groups, members can validate one another's experiences, offer culturally responsive mentorship, and share strategies for navigating professional spaces that may not always feel inclusive. Over time, this sense of community can foster resilience, confidence, and a deeper sense of belonging within the profession.

While some may mistakenly believe that affinity groups foster segregation, this perspective overlooks a crucial distinction: the difference between equality and equity. Equality means that everyone in an organization is treated the same, and equity means providing members with what they need to be successful based on their identities and lived experiences. For example, a program supporting music teacher professional development, such as discussing advanced assessment techniques and the use of quantitative evidence to support student learning, may be helpful for veteran music teachers with 10–20 years of experience but unhelpful and overwhelming for a first-year teacher. Equity in this scenario would mean gearing professional development for teachers in their first three years to the unique needs of this subset of state music education association (MEA) members.

To illustrate this point is a story from my student teaching experience. One day after school, I walked between two parked buses on the way to my car. As I passed the buses, a middle school student yelled "faggot" loudly out of a bus window. Not knowing what to do, I got in my car and drove home. I did not know how to bring this up with my cooperating teachers and eventually told my university supervisor in confidence. Even though my cooperating teachers were fantastic and helped me develop professionally as a music educator, both were cisgender, straight, married, white women, and I never felt like they understood my perspective as a gay teacher.

If an affinity group had been available, I could have shared the incident with other LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning) teachers who may have faced similar experiences. Instead, I felt alone and isolated, and I began to wonder if my dreams of being a secondary choral teacher would ever become reality. As my teaching career progressed, I began to

connect with more and more LGBTQ teachers who helped me understand how to reconcile my queer and professional teacher identities. I read encouraging stories in the book *One Teacher in Ten*, a collection of more than 30 accounts of LGBTQ teachers across the country, edited by Kevin Jennings, founder of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). I wish that I had found this information sooner. I think that I could have had an easier time in this profession had I truly found my people early on.

Affinity groups can be organized in a variety of ways and resemble Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), a term that may be more well known among PK–12 music teachers. Affinity groups can organize formal and informal events aimed at addressing the unique needs of group members. These events can range from social events to facilitated workshops and everything in between. Recent conferences of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) in Dallas and National Collegiate Choral Organization (NCCO) in Atlanta included various affinity group gatherings. According to NCCO, "We believe that we have much more work to do in supporting and catalyzing the diversity of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and disability within the choral professoriate." As an example, the following affinity group gatherings were held at the 2025 ACDA National Conference:

- The Choral Cookout (Black/African American gathering)
- Fiesta! Latin American Affinity Group Reception
- ICEP, International, and AAPINH Reception
- LGBTQIA+ Reception
- WiCHEd (Women in Choral Higher Education) Affinity Group Meeting

Such affinity group social gatherings can provide an opportunity for connection and networking. The LGBTQIA+ reception at National ACDA in 2025 was sponsored by GALA Choruses, the national organization supporting LGBTQ choruses in North America. This social gathering enabled GALA to advertise its mission to a large audience of ACDA members who may not have been familiar with this sibling organization.

Such social gatherings are by no means the only manifestation of an affinity group. More formal programs like mentorship programs and professional development events also are possible. The vignettes below provide two examples of what affinity groups in music education could look like.

Ramon is a proud Guatemalan American who came to the United States alone as a teenager. After settling with family in Southern California, he attended California State University, Fullerton, where he earned a bachelor's degree and a California Single-Subject Teaching Credential in music. Ramon showed great promise in his undergraduate and post-baccalaureate programs and was hired by a large suburban middle school in Orange County, California, to create a band program at this new school. After a semester, Ramon became discouraged because there seemed to be a disconnect with his students' parents.

While he felt well-prepared to teach music and was finding success with his students, Ramon was struggling to communicate with parents—always having the feeling that they didn't trust him. While attending the California All-State Music Education Conference during his first year, he connected with other Latinx/e music teachers. Ramon and several colleagues met for dinner at the conference. There was a vibrant energy in the air as they spoke. They understood one another. They related to one another. Their shared identity as Latinx/e music educators created a sense of kinship that Ramon had not experienced elsewhere in his school district.

Ramon and his colleagues decided to continue this dialogue. Ramon organized a monthly Zoom meeting and encouraged his colleagues to invite other Latinx/e music educators to attend. Ten educators joined the first month, 16 the second, and 28 the third. Eventually, a subset of these teachers formed a separate reading group in which they read and discussed the book *Latinx Experiences in U.S. Schools: Voices of Students, Teachers, Teacher Educators, and Education Allies in Challenging Sociopolitical Times* edited by Margarita Jiménez-Silva and Janine Bempechat. Several of the teachers in this small reading group began to pursue a three-summer master's degree in music education at San José State University and focused their culminating projects on the experiences of Latinx/e music teachers.

Rene is a generation 1.5 Korean American, meaning that she came to the U.S. from South Korea with her parents when she was three years old. The family settled in the Washington, D.C., area where Rene attended public schools in Prince George's County, Maryland. While in high school, she began working at a local daycare center and fell in love with working with young children. Upon arriving at the University of Maryland, Rene noticed that there were not many Asian or Asian American (AAM) students in the music education program. Rene felt especially isolated as the only AAM student focusing on elementary general music.

After graduation, Rene took a job in Fairfax County, Virginia, teaching elementary general music. After connecting with several of her AAM colleagues on Facebook and starting a small group chat, Rene approached the Virginia Music Educators Association (VMEA) about starting a group for teachers of AAM heritage. After convening for the first time at the VMEA conference, she started a resource page on the VMEA website and volunteered to serve

By fostering community, resilience, and shared purpose, affinity groups can play a vital role in sustaining music teachers throughout their careers—and, ultimately, in creating a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

as a resource for other AAM music teachers in the state. The annual AAM luncheon at VMEA attracted more members each year.

These two fictional vignettes demonstrate how an affinity group could work within a state MEA. Such groups can help to create a culture of safety for teachers who may not feel seen and understood in an organization in which many members may not share similar life experiences. In short, affinity groups can create a place in which music teachers, especially those early in their career, can *see themselves in the profession.*

You might be thinking, "this all sounds great, but my state doesn't have affinity groups." If this is true, you could reframe this as an opportunity rather than a challenge. As Rene's story above demonstrates, state MEA members can advocate for change in the organization that is designed to serve and support them. If you are feeling moved to start an affinity group, creating one could be as easy as emailing your state MEA president. It may be helpful to mention that other music professional organizations like ACDA and NCCO have formed affinity groups and/or host affinity group gatherings at conferences.

Creating an affinity group in your state might seem daunting. Here are some possible steps and suggestions:

- Connect with other music educators in your state and inquire if they would find affinity groups helpful, and, if so, if they would be willing to pitch in and help create them.
- Define a clear rationale for why music teachers of a particular identity group (e.g., Black music teachers, LGBTQ music teachers, AAM music teachers) would benefit from an affinity group in your state.
- Reach out to your state MEA leadership and advocate for adding affinity groups to the state organizational structure and time/space at the state MEA conference.
- Gather materials like websites, books, and articles that might be helpful for a PLC-type gathering.
- Anticipate questions about affinity groups promoting segregation and reflect on how you might use the lens of equality vs. equity discussed above to address these concerns.
- Reach out for help. There are members in other arts organizations that already have affinity groups (such as ACDA and NCCO) who may be willing to serve as a resource and sounding board.
- Remain patient. Starting something new can take some time.

The first few years of teaching can be extremely difficult, and music educators from historically marginalized backgrounds might face more complex challenges. Affinity groups may provide a space in which music teachers can learn more about themselves, seek support, and find their people. These spaces can help educators not only survive but thrive, offering a sense of validation and connection that is often missing in the broader professional environment. By fostering community, resilience, and shared purpose, affinity groups can play a vital role in sustaining music teachers throughout their careers—and, ultimately, in creating a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

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REFERENCE

1 Aaron M. Glassman and Myron Glassman, "The Use of Affinity Groups by Fortune 100 Firms," *Journal of Business Diversity* 17, no. 2 (2017): 104.

KAREN SALVADOR

Persisting and Thriving Through the DEI Backlash

Hilch / iStock / Getty Images Plus

It is a challenging time to be a music educator or music teacher educator, as a recent wave of legislation and executive orders has targeted diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and practices in PK–12 schools and higher education. Although music educators may disagree about these laws or DEI as a concept, in order to enact "music education for all," music educators must design instruction to engage students who have a variety of social and ability-based needs and who come from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

In this article, I provide definitions, suggestions, and resources, particularly for beginning or novice educators working to engage all students and support individual needs in music classrooms. Please note that I am not an attorney, just someone who has read a lot and collected and disseminated survey data on this topic. As I state later in the article, readers must take responsibility for reading and following applicable policy.

Definitions

DEI Backlash: The origin of the term "DEI backlash" is not clear. However, journalists consistently use this term to describe an ongoing phenomenon that began around 2022, characterized by corporations backing away from DEI efforts and states adopting laws and policies that curtailed or eliminated DEI efforts in PK-12 schools and on college campuses.

Divisive Concepts Laws (DCLs): The DEI backlash includes DCLs, which are state-level legislative or executive actions that limit instruction on topics including history, gender, race, and sexual orientation. Since 2021, 25 states have adopted DCLs, and local school boards in other states have enacted similar policies.

Federal Executive Orders: The DEI backlash also includes executive orders, which are directives issued by the President of the United States that have the force of law but do not require congressional approval. Lawsuits, judicial injunctions, local variances in interpretation, and upheaval at the U.S. Department of Education make it challenging to know what policies will result from these orders.

Impact on Music Education

DCLs have been in place for several years in some places. Some music educators who responded to surveys said that DCLs were not impacting their teaching, usually because there were no DCLs in their state, they had not heard of them, they believed the laws did not impact music curriculum or pedagogy, or they agreed with the laws. Other participants reported three main effects:

1. Limiting repertoire and pedagogy, particularly of musics that originated in Black communities and of pedagogies intended to increase engagement, success, and belonging for students from communities that are currently underrepresented in school music
2. Impacts on students such as feeling targeted by the laws or increased bullying at school
3. Increased stress or desire to leave the profession

Suggestions and Resources

Know the Exact Language of Laws or Policies That Affect You. I have noticed that people talking about these laws and policies in all kinds of settings often mis-state what the laws say, which means educators might be making decisions based on mis- or dis-information. Knowing the exact language is the best way for teachers to be informed about what is actually necessary in order to comply with laws and policies. For resources to access exact language at state and federal levels, see the sidebar on page 67. For local policies, consult your administration and ask for written guidance on how to interpret policy.

Avoid Unnecessary Self-Censorship. Music teachers responding to surveys said things like, "I took out my fifth-grade blues unit to avoid slavery discussion. . . . no one told me to, I just did it." Such self-censorship unnecessarily narrows the curriculum that music educators have been teaching for decades and erases musics that are vital parts of the American musical tapestry. Although most music educators are conflict-averse and their concerns that they may face backlash might be justified, pre-emptively silencing important repertoire is not the answer.

Resources for Navigating the DEI Backlash		
Resource	**Description**	**Location**
PEN America Index of Educational Gag Orders (EGOs)	This regularly updated airtable includes EGOs introduced since 2021; other higher ed bills; laws; and state policies/executive orders. You can filter or sort (e.g., by state or by topic). For each bill or law, the table provides information including the title, a link to the exact bill language, and a summary of notable provisions.	*https://airtable.com/appg59iDuPhILPPFp/shrtwubfBUo2tuHyO/tblZ40w5HLBuTK9vs/viw5IFPxKHGkamF0k?blocks=hide*
Federal Register	The Federal Register indexes executive orders (EOs) from all presidents since Franklin D. Roosevelt. Recent EOs affecting music educators and teacher educators include EO 14151, EO 14190, EO 14242, EO 14277, and EO 14279.	*https://www.federalregister.gov/presidential-documents/executive-orders/donald-trump/2025*
National Association for Music Education (NAfME) DCL Materials	NAfME resources include the following: ▪ 2023 DCL Report with FAQs on DCL and how other professional organizations were responding, information on DCL impacts, and information and resources from NAfME member experts. ▪ 2024 follow-up study with more information on educator responses.	*https://nafme.org/publications-resources/resource-library/?_search=dcl*

Build Relationships. Making assumptions about what people think can increase division by shutting down communication. Fostering relationships with students, parents/guardians, colleagues, and community members can build trust and create opportunities to find shared ground to build from. Music educators may also wish to form coalitions to offer moral support and collaborate on strategies for inclusive pedagogy and communication with administrators, students, parents/guardians, and community members.

Get Involved in Local Implementation. Teachers can have a significant influence at the local level by raising critical questions such as "The law states X—so why are we doing Y?" or by comparing how similar policies have been applied in other districts or schools. Research indicates that local interpretation and implementation can serve as a protective buffer, allowing policies to be carried out in the most humane and student-centered manner possible.

Conclusion

The DEI backlash creates challenges for music educators and teacher educators due to mis- and dis-information regarding policies and the potential that educators might be questioned for maintaining or augmenting important curriculum, repertoire, and pedagogical practices. However, thinking about what someone might need (or want) or what would help them feel comfortable or even valued is not discrimination. It is hospitality, good customer service, and evidence of human empathy and caring. Schools are not businesses with customers, but students (and teachers!) need hospitality, empathy, and caring to thrive. Music teachers can use the strategies in this article to support their work in providing music education for every student.

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B. Paid circulation. (1) Mailed subscriptions (outside-county). Average number of copies of each issue during preceding twelve months: 48,168; actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 38,516. (2) Mailed subscriptions (in-county). Average number of copies of each issue during preceding twelve months: 172; actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 16. (3) Paid distribution outside the mail including sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and other paid distribution outside the USPS. Average number of copies of each issue during preceding twelve months: 0; actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 0. (4) Paid distribution by other classes mail through the USPS: Average number of copies of each issue during preceding twelve months: 0; actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 0

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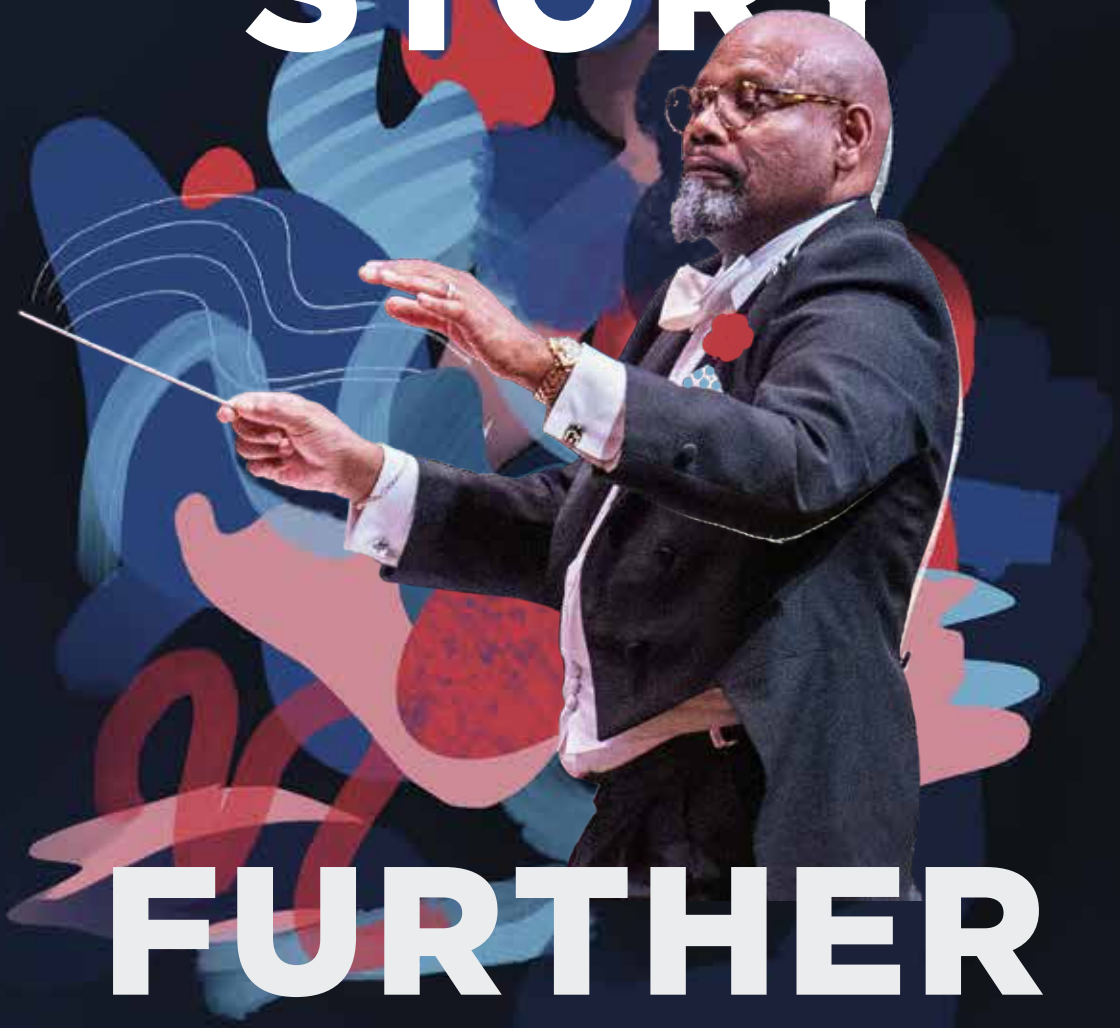

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