



## Developing Tomorrow's Music Teachers Today

Martin J. Bergee; Steven M. Demorest

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# Developing Tomorrow's Music Teachers Today

By Martin J. Bergee and Steven M. Demorest

**A**s we look toward the future of music education, one issue threatens to compromise more than 150 years of successful public school music instruction. There is a very real music teacher shortage. Articles dealing with this shortage and its implications can be found in a number of sources.<sup>1</sup> If we want to ensure that future generations have quality music education, the time to act is now. When teaching positions in music go unfilled, they all too often disappear.

MENC: The National Association for Music Education has responded by, among other things, developing advocacy materials addressing recruitment and retention of music teachers.<sup>2</sup> The National Executive Board of MENC has placed music teacher recruitment and retention at the top of its list of research priorities, ahead of such important issues as teacher attrition, student learning evaluations, availability of music instruction for young children, and technology in music instruction.

At the request of the National Executive Board, a group of researchers recently collected data on influences critical to a young person's decision to pursue music teaching as a career. We asked music education majors across the country to identify the most important people, experiences, events, organizations, and beliefs

*The results of a survey about influences on music education majors' career choice suggest ideas for recruiting future music educators.*

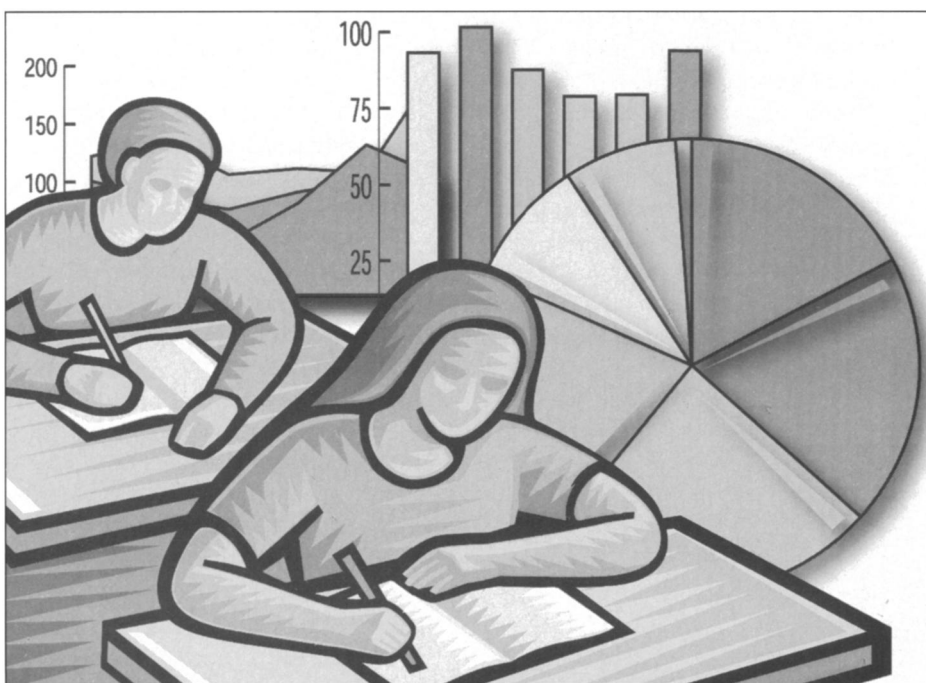


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that influenced their decision to choose music education as a career. A complete report of the results of this survey can be found on the MENC Web site at [www.menc.org/networks/rnc/Bergee-Report.html](http://www.menc.org/networks/rnc/Bergee-Report.html). We would like to highlight some of the major findings of that report and discuss how we can transform those findings into action.

### Why Become a Music Teacher?

A total of 431 music education majors responded to the survey. Their divisional affiliations closely matched the proportions found in the total Collegiate MENC membership. The great majority of the respondents were white (87.7%). The remainder indicated racial/ethnic identities of African-American (1.6%), Asian-American (2.1%), Hispanic/Latino (2.1%), Native American (0.7%), and "other" (1.6%). An additional 4.2% did not respond to this item. Most made the decision to become a music teacher while in high school, while 14% made the decision earlier (elementary, middle, or junior high years). Only 20% made the decision while in college. The findings from the survey are divided into the categories of people, experiences and events, personal feelings, and organizations that students felt were important in making their decision to pursue music education. (See the Influences on Decision to Teach Music sidebar.)

*People.* High school music teachers were highly influential in students' decisions to become music teachers, with 41% of respondents citing them as the most influential and another 29% as the second most influential in their decision to pursue music teaching. According to one respondent,

"The music educator at my former high school was a remarkable person and helped me and many others to develop a true love and appreciation of music." Parents/guardians (13%) and private instructors (10%) were also cited as having the most significant impact for some students. Elementary music teachers and higher education music faculty members were mentioned frequently as well.

*The most influential person in respondents' decision-making process was the high school teacher in their area of study.*

*Experiences and events.* The most influential experiences proved to be their own school ensemble experiences (54%), followed by All-District/All-State ensembles (24%) and solo and small-ensemble events (21%). Less frequently but still often indicated were church ensembles (12%), community ensembles (8%), higher education events (11%), and outside competitions (11%).

One experience that stood out in the minds of a number of respondents was the opportunity to teach while still in high school. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they were given opportunities to teach

while high school students and the extent to which these teaching opportunities influenced their decision. Half of the respondents (49%) indicated either "no opportunities" or "yes, but not often." Of the 51% remaining, 24% indicated "yes, sometimes," 15% "yes, regularly," and 12% "yes, often." Of those given opportunities to teach, over half (57%) indicated either a "significant" or "very strong" influence. An additional 30% indicated "some" influence.

*Feelings.* We asked students to identify other factors that influenced their career choice from a list that included feelings about music and teaching. An overwhelming 98% of respondents chose "love of music" as one of the most influential other factors, with 59% choosing it as the most influential other factor. Other strongly indicated factors were "felt called to teach" and "desire to work with people." It would seem that in many cases we don't choose music; rather, music chooses us. As might be expected, the salary and benefits that usually come with teaching (e.g., summer vacation, relatively early retirement) were not frequently chosen as reasons for entering the field.

*Organizations.* Tri-M Music Honor Society did not seem to be a factor with these respondents, and comments related to Collegiate MENC were mixed. About half the respondents indicated that CMENC was either "no" or a "small" factor, whereas the other half indicated CMENC as "strong," "significant," or "somewhat" a factor.

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These results give us some insight into the people, experiences, and beliefs that shape a young person's choice of music teaching as a career. They can also serve to guide those of us already in the profession on how best to identify and recruit new music teachers. (See the Developing Tomorrow's Teachers sidebar.) By far, the most influential person in respondents' decision-making process was the high school teacher in their area of study (band, chorus, or orchestra). This is not to negate the important influence of other music teachers;

## Influences on Decision to Teach Music

People	High school music teacher	41%
	Parents	13%
	Private teacher	10%
Experiences	School ensemble	54%
	All-District/All-State	24%
	Festivals	21%
Feelings	Love of music	59%
	Called to teach	9%
	Working with people	10%

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high school teachers, however, encounter students during the time that they are making important decisions about their future. Some high school music teachers may not be aware of the profound influence they have on a young person's decision to pursue music teaching as a profession. What follows are some concrete suggestions for high school music teachers based on the data we collected. These suggestions can help them identify and recruit the next generation of music teachers.

*Provide opportunities to teach.* Half of the respondents in the survey indicated either no or few opportunities to teach while in high school. Only about a quarter (27%) indicated that they were given such opportunities "regularly" or "often." Over half of those who had taught, however, indicated that these opportunities were either a significant or very strong influence. One respondent wrote:

The single greatest influence in my choosing music education as a career was my being given many opportunities in high school to teach and direct my peers and younger students. ... By working as an assistant to conductors, teachers, and directors, I was given a model and a basis for forming my own teaching style. If I had never been put in teaching roles, I would never have known that I had talent and desire for this field.

High school music teachers must understandably protect their large-ensemble rehearsal time. However, the survey asked respondents to indicate any opportunity to teach—sectionals, small groups, drum majoring, one-on-one tutoring, and so forth. The dearth of teaching opportunities is a serious concern. Students considering music teaching as a career should be given frequent and ongoing opportunities to teach, from individual and small-group lessons to occasional large-ensemble rehearsals. One opportunity to teach in the large ensemble, for example, is the warm-up period. Allowing students to lead warm-ups provides valuable teaching opportunities and frees the teacher to deal with

## **Provide opportunities to teach.**

- Allow students to warm up the group.
- Try peer coaching of soloists and small groups.
- Train students to run effective sectionals.

## **Encourage students to participate in solos and small ensembles.**

- Recruit for broader student participation.
- Consider incorporating mini-events into your year.
- Have clinicians discuss music teaching as a career.

## **Encourage greater participation of underrepresented students.**

- Add an ensemble outside the standard mold with broader cultural appeal.
- Identify and remove economic and social barriers to participation in your district.
- Recruit young students from underrepresented groups in elementary school.

## **Broaden and deepen the ensemble experience itself.**

- Cultivate students' love of music.
  - Teach through the music for broader artistic understanding.
  - Share your passion for music and teaching!
- 

administrative tasks or to provide one-on-one instruction to struggling students. An added benefit is the increased attention students often give to one of their own, as well as their increased appreciation of how many things *you* do while teaching them. Students' teaching need not compromise other students' learning. Properly mentored, it capably supplements the teacher's work.

One possibility, in addition to the use of large-ensemble rehearsal time, would be the establishment of a before- or after-school students-teaching-students program. These programs could involve one-on-one or small-group instruction, with the older and more mature students perhaps receiving credit toward their grade or toward community service.

*Encourage students to participate in solo and small-ensemble events.* Respondents indicated that solo and small-ensemble events, as well as honors ensembles, were influential experiences. It is no surprise that honors events are strongly motivational. Talented high school students value the opportunity to make music with similarly oriented peers, especially in

selective honors settings. Solo and small-ensemble events actually received higher marks as influential experiences than honors ensembles, and they have the benefit of being available to all students. High school music teachers might consider setting aside regular time throughout the school year to facilitate solo and small-ensemble experiences for students and to enter these solos and small ensembles in adjudicated festivals. Because such events are usually made available only to select students for a limited time around festival season, giving promising students the opportunity to coach one another on a regular basis might provide a more ongoing experience that would motivate students to pursue a career in teaching.

We often allow students to self-select for contests because we know that student motivation and commitment are required for a successful outcome. Some students may need a little extra encouragement to take the leap into these activities, but once committed they become highly motivated. Contest and festival participation hones students' performing and audi-

tioning skills, which may increase their chances of participating in an honors ensemble down the road. With regard to honors events, organizers may consider setting aside some time to allow the conductor to discuss with students in the ensemble the requirements, possibilities, challenges, and rewards associated with teaching music as a career.

*Encourage greater participation of underrepresented students.* The respondents' overwhelmingly white demographic probably reflects that of participants in high school music programs, in which performing ensembles predominate. Where budgetary and other circumstances allow, high school music teachers might consider offering a broader array of ensembles. Options could include choirs oriented to world music, drumming classes, steel drum ensembles, and so forth. Such offerings may attract broader participation in music programs, which in turn may lead to broader racial and ethnic representation in the future music teacher corps. Teachers who have expanded their offerings outside their comfort zone often report tremendous personal and musical satisfaction at increasing their musicianship while extending their influence to a greater number of students. In addition, music teachers at all levels should carefully examine other barriers to minority music participation, such as the cost of instruments, extracurricular time, and private lesson or practice opportunities. If we can help underrepresented students get a solid grounding early, there is a better chance that they will participate in high school and college programs.

*Broaden and deepen the ensemble experience itself.* Respondents wrote of a deep and abiding love of music. One expressed that she "could be here for a week writing down my life story about how I chose the major. I have always excelled in music and had a calling to it." Another wrote, "If I wasn't in music, I don't know where my life would be headed. I love what I do and can't wait to make beautiful music with my students." A third respondent will teach "because I have to—I love it and it makes me feel whole. It's just like music—I do it because I have to;

I cannot survive without it." A fourth wrote, "Music is *all* I ever wanted to be involved in." But, as Brand has said, love of music is not enough.<sup>3</sup> Students need opportunities to learn what teaching is really like, and they need to learn more about music as an art and craft. Ensemble rehearsals are ideal occasions for students to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and create. Furthermore, opportunities are there to learn more about the historical and cultural backgrounds of the music being rehearsed. These kinds of activities, regularly incorporated into high school rehearsals, might lead students to see the "academic" aspects of music—history and theory, for example—as indispensable components of performing experiences.

*Respondents wrote of a deep and abiding love of music.*

### Summary

Our job as music teachers is much broader than working with those few students who wish to follow in our footsteps. We must encourage and inspire all of the students involved in our programs. Still, given the powerful influence that this survey attributed to the high school music teacher, we must consider how we might identify and nurture potential teachers more directly. Take the time to speak with interested and promising students about how much music teaching has meant to you. Telling them how personally and professionally rewarding it has been will certainly influence students in strong and positive ways. Of course, the opposite is true as well. Music teachers who find their profession unrewarding and unsatisfying will likely communicate these feelings to students. We sometimes get caught up in all the small things that our jobs require and forget the fundamental reasons we became music teachers. Passion for what we do is the most powerful tool for motivating all students, and it will strike a chord with those who see themselves in our shoes.

College music educators must also play a greater role. One way we can help is to communicate regularly with high school teachers about students who have shown an interest in music teaching. In our clinics and outreach programs, we could build in opportunities for high school musicians to try their hand at conducting. We must also begin to talk to our college and university schools of music and our state organizations about better scholarship support for music education majors.

Millions of children's experiences with school music, now and in the future, depend on actions all of us take today. Good music teachers must be encouraged, nurtured, developed, and valued. All of us who currently teach must accept this responsibility. We should not just assume that quality music teachers will always be there. Talented young music students often have other abilities as well. Other professions, some more lucrative, compete for their interest. Active steps based on good information, such as the ones discussed above, might help encourage promising young students to commit to the enriching and rewarding profession of teaching music.

### Notes

1. Edward Asmus, "The Increasing Demand for Music Teachers," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 8 (spring 1999): 5–6; Virginia Bennett, "The Shortage of Music Teachers: The Response of a Concerned Profession," *Iowa Music Educator* 53, no. 2 (2000): 16–17; Mel Clayton, "Reflections: Future Colleagues?" *Teaching Music* 8 (February 2001): 8–9; Marshall C. Kimball, "Recruiting Potential Music Teachers," *Teaching Music* 7 (April 2000): 42–43; Patti J. Krueger, "Beginning Music Teachers: Will They Leave the Profession?" *Update* 19 (fall–winter 2000): 22–26; and Tim Lautzenheiser, "Wanted: Music Teachers for the Present and Future," *Teaching Music* 9 (December 2001): 36–39, 52.

2. MENC, "Promoting the Profession: Recruiting and Retaining Music Teachers," *Teaching Music* 8 (December 2000): 47–50.

3. Manny Brand, "The Love of Music Is Not Enough," *Music Educators Journal* 88 (March 2002): 45–46, 53. ■

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## **Notes**

### <sup>3</sup> **The Love of Music Is Not Enough**

Manny Brand

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