

**KMEA-Sponsored Mentoring in
Kentucky:
A New Dimension**

**A Report of the 2006-2007 Mentoring Taskforce
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The early years of teaching music are challenging ones for new teachers regardless of their backgrounds or preparation. New teachers are often overwhelmed with their new responsibilities, beginning their new careers in a sort of “survival” mode, often feeling totally alone as the new teacher in the building. They tend to focus on classroom management and materials rather than on instruction and often do not find enjoyment in the music, the teaching, or the interaction with students that they were expecting in this profession. Says Paul Haack:

Teachers are a great source of talent and potential, deserving of collegial support similar to the other professions. All teachers, particularly beginning teachers, need to feel closely related to their peers. Emotional support, collaboration and interaction are critical to their success and their development. (27)

We know from research statistics that many teachers leave the profession in the first four or five years. We have also seen through research that this attrition rate is significantly lowered when an effective teacher assistance program is put into place. New teachers perceive their own teaching and the teaching profession more positively. They tend to stay in the profession and work to become effective, successful teachers.

In 2003 MENC published Great Beginnings for Music Teachers: Mentoring and Supporting New Teachers. This book provides research statistics and information about the needs of beginning music teachers. It also outlines several state-sponsored programs and provides insights into critical issues in mentoring and professional development.

When KMEA President Lynn Cooper appointed a mentoring taskforce in 2006, this publication was one of the suggested readings on mentoring. At the request of taskforce chair, KMEA purchased and distributed copies to each taskforce member as groundwork and context to their mission. Because of President Cooper’s strong commitment to the need to support new music teachers in the state of Kentucky, the Taskforce on Mentoring was charged with studying the issues and creating a workable mentoring program to be sponsored by the membership of KMEA for this state.

Taskforce members read this book and other articles about mentoring and support/professional development for new teachers. Out of these readings emerged key questions, responses to which would shape the Kentucky program. A questionnaire was distributed to taskforce members in January 2007. The questionnaire was also presented to KMEA Board members at the Winter Board Meeting and to others, including the organization of retired music teachers, at the KMEA conference in February. At this point the taskforce chair collated responses and comments.

Mentoring Questionnaire Responses

Who would need or benefit from a KMEA-sponsored mentoring program? Who should be the primary beneficiaries of our new program? These were the first questions asked on the survey. Everyone agreed that first year teachers should be the focus of the program, but many respondents wanted to open the program to teachers new to Kentucky or new to a grade level, building, or music teaching area.

The second question asked how long the mentorship should last. 50% said one year only; 25% said one to two years, and 25% said one year required, then as long as needed. On the question of whether mentors should be requested or assigned, the responses were divided. Comments included the idea that those new teachers who requested a mentor would be more likely to value the program, contrasted with the views that many new teachers might be embarrassed or otherwise reluctant to ask for help, thus defeating the purpose of the mentorship program.

As to who should serve as mentors, the overwhelming response was current or retired K-12 teachers. College/University current or retired faculty might be acceptable, but only if they had sufficient and relatively current K-12 teaching experience. Being a KMEA member was deemed important for the mentor, as this membership would be one indicator of professional commitment. Years of teaching (most often suggested: 10+ years) would be a major criterion for selecting qualified mentors, although it was mentioned frequently that success in teaching and program building was more important than a specific number of years. Experience with the KTIP program was not seen as very important, but knowledge of and experience with the KY Core Content was highly desirable for mentors.

A Likert scale was included to gauge how important respondents felt it was to match mentors with mentees' teaching areas and levels. While a few said that this match was desirable but not essential, most felt that this match was crucial to the success and validity of the program. (Most resource readings also named the matching of teaching areas and grade levels as one of the most helpful factors in successful mentorships.)

The question that asked how often mentors and mentees should be in contact with each other drew a wide variety of responses. Contacts may be face-to-face, but may also be phone calls and emails. Because of the variety of contacts, the consensus was that the target should be set at once a month. Respondents realized that mentors might be needed much more in the first part of the year and less in the latter part of the first year. Comments reminded us that while email may be the easiest form of communication, there do need to be some face-to-face meetings, away from the distractions of school. The first meeting between mentor and mentee should occur early, before or within the first month of school. This category needs a framework or suggested time-line, but not a required abundance of extra meetings that would make the mentorship an additional burden. The needs of the mentees should influence the number of contacts needed.

Because the proposed KMEA Mentoring program is being devised without grant funding, as were some of the case studies in the books, issues about funding this program had to be a part of the questionnaire. What would it take to get both mentors and mentees to participate? What would be the perks of the program for each? Could KMEA do this with limited (or no) funding? Mentoring is an act of helping. For the mentor, it is helping, serving, and “paying it back” to keep the profession strong and vital. With this altruistic attitude, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that mentors should not be paid to serve. However, it was suggested by many that a limited allotment for mileage and/or a couple of meals with the mentor would be extremely helpful. If offered a reduced registration fee at the KMEA conference, they would also appreciate this, but the mileage/meal monies would be preferable. Mentees have the perk of having a mentor, which should be reward and motivation enough. The committee strongly encourages the “New Teacher Track” of sessions at KMEA to continue, adding a session for mentors and mentees. Many first year teachers have difficulty funding their trip to attend KMEA. Again, it was said by many to be helpful if there was a reduced registration fee for mentees, but this was not essential. Some cited other sources of funding for new teachers to attend the conference; these will be mentioned later in the report.

A item on the questionnaire asked how the proposed mentoring program would be different from the KTIP program already in place in the state, understanding that, for first year teachers, these two programs would be running simultaneously. The comments helped clarify the basic purposes and procedures of the mentorship. Not only are the professionals involved two different sets of people, the goal of assessment of a new teacher’s competence is a part of the KTIP program only. There is support and professional growth guidance in each program, but the mentoring program should have no assessment component, no portfolio, and no required block of hours. The mentoring relationship should be solely based on the desire to support, inform, and guide the new teacher. Seen as more valid because the mentor is in the same field, the mentoring program would be more “relaxed” and more “teacher friendly.”

While most respondents easily replied to the questions regarding then purposes and structure of the mentoring program, when asked about the administration or oversight of the program, responses were more varied. Many said they had not thought through this portion of the program design. Some suggested that the program be solely the responsibility of district presidents while others suggested that we have a state Mentorship Committee. One suggested that state chairs for each division (band, general music, etc.) handle the mentoring program responsibilities. The suggestions proposed in the report are an integration of recommendations from taskforce members, KMEA members, and program reports from other states that have music teacher mentoring programs.

In the final section respondents were asked for additional comments. The strongest comment received frequently was to go slowly in implementing this important and significant program. The call to design the program carefully, to pilot and then evaluate it before making it widely available was heard, as will be evident in the conclusion of the report.

The Proposal:

The overarching goals of the KMEA-Sponsored Mentoring Program are to provide a music-specific support system in order to retain new music teachers and to help them become successful practitioners. The program would seek to promote the personal and professional well being of beginning music teachers, helping new teachers feel assisted and successful in their teaching positions and choice of careers.

The program would automatically pair up a new teacher and a mentor with expertise and experience in the areas and/or levels of the mentee. It would be open, upon request, to teachers new to Kentucky or new to a teaching level or area within the field of music. (New teachers may decline participation in the mentoring program.) District presidents will identify new music teachers and will collect contact and teaching assignment information from them. Ideally the KMEA website will also have a webpage for new music teachers that will have links to the forms for new teacher information. This website should be shared with school administrators across the state to promote good school relations. Administrators need to see that a professional organization is providing a content-specific support system that will augment but not interfere with the KTIP process.

Initially the District president will also compile a list of recommended mentors in the district that have been successful teachers in named areas of music teaching. When the new teacher or mentoring webpage is up and running, application forms for prospective mentors can be placed here, and the state Mentoring Chair can collate the information. After a pilot year in which the District president matches mentee and mentor, the state Mentoring Chair may wish to have a formal mentor selection process, possibly including a “training” session that potential mentors have to attend (just as some state require contest adjudicators to attend a training session every three or so years). It is also possible that the state Mentoring Chair will wish to make a list of mentors available to new teachers so that they may choose someone in their geographic and teaching area.

In the pilot year, each district will be asked to choose one or two new teachers in different music teaching areas and grade levels. The president will assign a qualified (based on the findings of the taskforce) mentor who is teaching or has taught in a similar area and grade level assignment. The mentors will make the initial contacts with the mentees assigned to them and will document the contacts (date, type of contact, topics). One-year mentorships are the current recommendation. However, based on pilot program feedback, the Mentorship Chair may wish to make a two-year program available or may wish to make the dyad (original mentor and mentee) a triad in the second year, adding a new teacher to the original mentor and now 2nd year teacher.

Mentors and mentees should be in contact as often as needed, but at least once a month. One face-to-face meeting (away from school) should occur in or before the first month of teaching. Two face-to-face meetings per year should be the minimum. Again, mentors

should document the meetings and contacts. If possible, some funds will be made available to the mentor for mileage and meals to meet with the mentee.

Mentors should encourage membership in MENC/KMEA for their mentees, but this is not a condition of the mentorship. Mentors should strongly encourage their mentees to attend the KMEA conference. KMEA may be able to provide reduced registration rates for first year teachers who are in the mentoring program. The KMEA conference should continue its “New Teacher Track” with sessions designed specifically for the first or second year teachers. A session (or meal or reception) should be added for mentors and mentees. Ideally, this would be a roundtable or panel discussion with mentors and mentees, about issues that have been encountered in teaching. Each district should be encouraged to pursue ways of providing some funding for new teachers to attend the KMEA conference.

Both mentor and mentee would complete a program evaluation form at the end of the school year. These forms (also on the new webpage) would be submitted to the state Mentoring Chair. This person would collate the data and use the information shared to improve the program and make decisions for the next year’s program. It is suggested that this formal feedback be shared with KMEA through Board meeting reports and journal articles. It would also be helpful to share the information with music teacher preparation programs in the state. If there is funding for mentors’ mileage and meals, the receipt of the end-of-year mentoring report (documentation of contacts and program evaluation) may be what initiates payment.

Ideally, the state Mentoring Chair would work with the KMEA office to set up a chat room on the KMEA website specifically for new teachers. Mentors would be assigned for specific time periods to cover responses in their teaching areas/levels. However, other teachers, new or old, could participate in the sharing of ideas, strategies, and support. The original idea is for the new teachers to pose the questions, but there may also be a desire to have a question-of-the-month to which KMEA members respond in a threaded discussion format. Other ideas may come forward for the use of the website to reinforce the mentoring process and allow all to be a part of a state-level music education network.

Conclusion

A mentor is “a wise and trusted counselor or friend” according to Webster’s dictionary. Kimpton reminds us that effective mentoring prepares teachers for “greater personal and professional leadership and success.”

Mentoring is not a short-term or a once-in-a-while activity; its value grows because mentoring helps to develop an individual’s experience, knowledge, and, eventually, wisdom. What sets mentoring apart from other activities is learning how to synthesize and apply knowledge to new situations. Done well, mentoring nurtures a reflective behavior in teaching that is essential to the growth of this art.

Formal mentoring programs began in the mid-1980's along with the teacher accountability movement. Different types of programs with different sponsoring agencies have been attempted and refined or discarded, but the need for "inducting" new teachers into the profession of music education is becoming more and more critical as we seek to support, and retain the next generation of music educators. KMEA has a history of teachers helping teachers. We believe the Music Mentoring Program is essential to music education in Kentucky as it will formalize and organize efforts to continue that philosophy of nurturing support for new professionals in the commonwealth.

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Appendix

Mentoring Questionnaire
Summer 2007 Board Meeting Report (Summary Report)
Pilot Program Schedule
Sample Mentor Application

**KMEA Task Force on Mentoring
Questionnaire**

1. Which teachers should the mentoring program target?
- First year teachers only
 - Teachers new to Kentucky
 - Teachers beginning in a new building, area, or grade level of teaching
 - Other

Comments _____

2. How long should the mentoring period be?
- 1 year
 - 2 years
 - Other

Comments _____

3. Should mentors be assigned to all new teachers or should new teachers have the option to request a music mentor?
- Assigned
 - Requested

Comments _____

4. Who should serve as mentors? (Check all that apply.)
- Current K-12 teachers
 - Current university music education faculty
 - Former or retired K-12 teachers
 - Former or retired university faculty
 - Other

Comments _____

10. What should be the “perks” for the mentor?
_____ Free or reduced fee registration at KMEA
_____ Payment for being a mentor
_____ Reimbursement for travel, meals with mentee
_____ Other

Comments _____

11. How would the KMEA Mentoring Program be different from the KTIP experience for new music teachers?

Comments _____

12. Who should oversee the program, select and assign mentors, and assess the results of this program?

Comments _____

13. From your experience, what about a proposed music teacher mentoring program would help retain (or repel) new teachers in the field?

Comments _____

What other advice would you like to share about the creation of a mentoring program administered by KMEA?

**KMEA Task Force on Mentoring
Summary
May 2007**

Goals of the Mentoring Program: To provide a music-specific support system in order to help retain new music teachers and help them become successful music practitioners.

- The mentoring program should be provided for all first year music teachers in the state. Those teachers who are new to Kentucky or new to a level or area of teaching may request a mentor.
- The formal (minimum) time for the mentoring period would be one school year. A second year continuing mentorship is possible but optional. One unique idea is to have the first year pair expand to a trio in the second year, consisting of mentor, new first year mentee, and now 2nd year teacher. The second year triad would also be optional.
- While many would agree that the first year teachers who request a mentor would be more likely to value the program, some new teachers might be embarrassed to ask for a mentor. In the first (pilot) year of this program, a mentor will be assigned to the selected new teachers. There will be 1-2 new teacher and mentor pairs in each district who will officially be a part of the Music Mentoring Pilot Program. During the year a list or directory of qualified mentors will be compiled. In the future, a mentor will be made available to each new teacher. The directory of mentors may provide an element of choice for new teachers to choose their own mentors based on similar teaching assignments and geographic proximity.
- Selecting effective mentors is of major importance to the program's success. It is generally assumed that experienced current or retired K-12 teachers will be the best mentors, yet the level of success of those teachers' programs should also be a part of the mentor selection process. Some current teachers would be tremendously effective mentors after four or five years teaching in a particular field. University faculty should only be used if they have sufficient and current public school teaching experience.
- Matching mentor's and mentee's teaching area and/or grade level is essential. This is the step that would provide the most valid information to the new teachers.
- Mentors should be in contact with their mentees at least once a month during the first year. Contacts may be made via email, phone, or face-to-face. The first face-to-face meeting should be made early: before school starts is best, or at least within the first month of teaching. There should be some flexibility in these contact requirements as the mentee may need more help at the start of the year and less help as the year goes on. Mentors will be asked to keep a log of communications with mentees.

- Mentors should be successful, experienced KMEA music teachers. They need to have some experience with the KY Core Content. KTIP experience is not

particularly important as the two programs have different goals and will be run by different professionals.

- The new teachers will be strongly encouraged to attend the KMEA conference and to participate in sessions designed for new music teachers (“new teacher track”). It would be helpful for KMEA to provide some financial assistance by means of a reduced registration fee if possible. Individual districts should be looking into ways to provide financial assistance for their new teachers to attend KMEA as well. Having a helpful mentor is the most important perk of the program for the new teacher.
- Mentors would not be paid for serving, but would appreciate having a limited mileage/meal allowance, if possible, for the few face-to-face meetings with mentees. Mentors would also appreciate a reduced registration fee at KMEA conference, but this is not crucial.
- There should be a KMEA session (roundtable or panel discussion) or a meal/reception for mentors and mentees that is a part of the “new teacher track.” It is suggested that there also be a “training” or information session at KMEA for mentors to acquaint them with their roles as mentors. Similar to other states’ sessions for contest adjudicators, mentors might be required to attend a session before mentoring and every three years hence to update their status as “certified mentors” for KMEA.
- The KMEA website should have a webpage for the mentoring program that includes a link to a mentoring chat room to address various questions of the new teachers. That website would also have links to any forms needed in this program.
- **A Mentoring Program Chair should be appointed as an ongoing position on the KMEA Board of Directors. This person would provide the oversight and evaluation for the annual mentoring efforts. He or she would distribute to and collect information from district presidents, would maintain the Mentor Directory (overseeing the selection of mentors), would collect annual program evaluations and would make changes, as needed, in the mentoring program, and would be a part of the KMEA conference planning to provide input and help coordinate the “New Teacher Track” sessions, including a session for mentors. He or she would also share the results and implications with KMEA members and college/university music teacher preparation faculty.**
- The first year of the KMEA-sponsored mentoring program would be a pilot year, trying out the proposed procedures with a limited group of mentors and mentees (1-2 from each district) who represent a variety of music areas and grade levels while getting website information, forms, mentor lists, and procedures up and running. Evaluations and feedback from the pilot year (2007-2008) would be used to refine the program design before it is opened to all new music teachers in 2008-2009.

Music Mentoring Program Pilot Program Schedule

Do Immediately

- Taskforce Chair prepares article for Fall 2007 *Bluegrass Music News* announcing the Music Mentoring Program and its Pilot Year.
- KMEA President appoints Chair for Mentoring, hence called “Coordinator”.
- Coordinator contacts all district presidents and explains the new program and the procedures for the pilot program.
- District presidents identify one (or two) new teachers in their districts to participate in the pilot program and contacts appropriate mentors. Presidents inform coordinator of mentor’s and mentee’s names, teaching assignments, and contact information.
- Coordinator sends mentoring information to mentors.
- Mentors contact mentees as soon as possible. Mentors set up first meeting (face to face), preferably before school starts or in the first few weeks of school.
- Coordinator works with KMEA to arrange funding for mentors’ mileage/meals and possible conference registration fee reductions for mentors and mentees.

Do During Fall 2007

- Coordinator works with KMEA Board on conference sessions for new teachers and adds a meeting/session/reception for pilot program mentors and mentees.
- Coordinator plans a KMEA session for those interested in serving as mentors in the following year.
- Coordinator attends Fall CMENC conference, if possible, to talk with students.
- Coordinator works with KMEA to set up a mentoring site linked to the KMEA homepage. Site may eventually include applications for mentors and mentees, information about the program, and a chat room for teachers staffed by mentors.
- Coordinator prepares an article for Winter *Bluegrass Music News* with a Mentor Application (and directions to online forms). This form should appear in subsequent issues of BMN, at least for the pilot year.

Do During Winter/Spring 2008

- Coordinator attends conference planning session to prepare for the KMEA conference in the following year.
- Coordinator attends 2008 conference and presides at mentoring sessions, gathers informal feedback on the pilot program, and informs others about the program for future years.

- Coordinator collects applications for 2008-2009 mentors and decides on selection/review procedure. Coordinator makes a list of mentors with geographic location and teaching experience/areas/levels.
- At the end of the year (date to be set by Coordinator), Coordinator distributes and collects program evaluation forms from mentors and mentees and collects meeting/expense log from mentors.
- Coordinator submits expense requests from mentors to KMEA for payment.
- Coordinator makes changes in mentoring program as deemed necessary from the pilot program.
- Coordinator writes an article for the *Bluegrass Music News* about the first year of the KMEA Music Mentoring Program.

---SAMPLE---

**KMEA
MUSIC MENTORING PROGRAM**

The KMEA Music Mentoring Program is an effort to provide assistance and support for new music teachers by matching new teachers with experienced teachers in similar job assignments. A Directory of KMEA-approved Music Mentors is constantly being updated. Please check the KMEA website for a complete list of Music Mentors.

MENTOR APPLICATION

Name _____

Home Address _____

City, State Zip code _____

KMEA District _____

Phone Numbers Home () _____

Cell () _____

Email Address _____

Name of School _____

School Address _____

City, State Zip code _____

School Phone () _____

Teaching Specialty (circle) Choir Band Orchestra General Music

Teaching Level (circle) Elementary Middle School High School

Other Special Areas (e.g. Keyboard Lab, Orff Ensemble) _____

Years of Music Teaching Experience _____

Please provide name, title, and email address or phone number of a music teacher who is familiar with your music program

Return Form To:

XXX, Coordinator
Music Mentoring Program
--KMEA Address--