

Edited by
Mary Ellen Cavitt, Texas State University—San Marcos

Profile of a Career Music Educator

Vicki D. Baker
Texas Woman's University

Our nation's schools are required to annually combat the costly and daunting task of filling over 500,000 teacher vacancies as 15% of all teachers either migrate to another school or leave the profession (Gruber, Willey, Broughman, Strizek, & Burian-Fitzgerald, 2002). Teacher attrition poses a problem to music education, as well, with 11% to 27% of music educators planning to leave the teaching profession annually (Hancock, 2008; Killian & Baker, 2006). With the increasing demand for new music educators, the decline in music education graduates, and the number of music teachers leaving the field (Asmus, 1999; Hill, 2003; Kimpton, 2005; Lindeman, 2004), major deficits ensue. In addition, this high level of teacher turnover has a negative impact on budgets, program stability, teaching quality, and student achievement (Grissmer & Kirby, 1997; Podgursky, Monroe, & Watson, 2004).

To address the problem of teacher turnover, much attention has been given to the causes of attrition and migration. Based on data acquired from the National Center for Education Statistics, Hancock (2009) found that between 1988 and 2001, 84% of music teachers remained in their current positions, 10% moved to different schools, and 6% quit the teaching profession every year. Rather than focusing on the educational defectors, it might be more enlightening to pose the question, "What keeps 84% of music teachers in the profession?"

Few studies have been conducted to ascertain why music educators make the decision to remain in the teaching field. A study conducted by Cutietta and Thompson (2000) surveyed 25 music educators who had taught from 15 to 33 years and found several defining characteristics. Firstly, they tended to have successful programs because they had a realistic concept of what their students could achieve and were not afraid to demand a high level of performance. Secondly, they were more "child-centered" in their approach to teaching and were not as concerned about accolades or recognition from administrators or parents. Finally, these career educators were most profoundly rewarded by hearing from former students how they had impacted their lives, by having students express their appreciation, and by seeing how their teaching had changed a student's life. In summary, these veteran educators agreed that "music teaching is about music and kids" (Cutietta & Thompson, 2000, p. 51).

Method

Participants included Texas music educators teaching at all grade levels, Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. E-mails were sent to all of the elementary, choir, band, and orchestra

teachers in Denton Independent School District and Dallas ISD requesting that they complete the survey online. Members of the Texas Music Administrators Conference, including the fine arts directors of most of the school districts in Texas, were sent an e-mail asking that they distribute the request to complete the survey to their music teachers. The state of Texas is divided into 28 Regions by the Texas Music Educators Association. Using the online directories to obtain names and addresses, e-mails were sent to music educators in Regions 2, 3, 5, 7, 20, 24, and 25. Those regions were selected because they include suburban, urban, and rural schools, and, because they are located in the North Texas area near the researcher's university, it was hoped that name recognition would increase the response rate. A total of 357 educators responded, which was deemed a large enough sample for the research study.

The survey was developed by the Teacher Retention Area of Strategic Planning (ASPA), which is affiliated with the Society for Music Teacher Education. The ASPA was comprised of four members currently serving on university music education faculties and two music education doctoral candidates. Six experienced music educators examined it for validity, made suggested changes, piloted both the questions and the e-mail process using participants not represented in the final survey, made more revisions, and arrived at the final version of the survey.

The first portion of the survey focused on demographic information: gender, age, ethnicity, and marital status. The following set of questions examined the respondent's educational background: highest educational degree attained, area of specialization, method of certification, and type of schools attended prior to college (i.e., urban, suburban, etc.) Other areas examined included current job assignment (teaching area and type of school) and commitment to job as defined by number of non-required hours worked daily, number of outside rehearsals, number of years planning to continue teaching, and number of years planning to teach until retirement.

Using a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high), respondents were asked to rank items in each of the following categories: Factors Impacting Decision to Persist as a Music Educator; Respondents' Self-Evaluation of Teaching Skills; and Respondents' Self-Evaluation of Character Traits.

Results

Results, based on 357 returned surveys, consisted of frequency of responses to each question on the survey. The mean, median, and mode of the Likert-scale rankings were calculated and placed in rank order for ease of comparison.

Number of years teaching music was reported in five-year increments, beginning with the sixth year and extending to 26+ years. Forty-three percent of respondents had taught for over 20 years, providing a large sample of experienced music educators (see Table 1). The majority of the respondents were female (56%). Ages of respondents were categorized in 10-year increments (see Table 2), with the largest percentage falling in the 30–39 years of age bracket (32%). Forty percent of respondents were 50 years or older. Caucasians comprised the largest ethnic group (90%), followed by African-Americans (4%) and Hispanics (3%). Most of the respondents reported being married (79%), with the remainder being single (12%), divorced (8%), and widowed (1%).

Career music educators' years of teaching experience (N = 357)

Years Teaching Music	% of Respondents
6-10	21%
11-15	22%
16-20	15%
21-25	12%
26+	31%

Table 2

Age of respondents (N=357)

Age in years	% of Respondents
20-29	3%
30-39	32%
40-49	24%
50-59	28%
60+	12%

Investigation of the educational background of respondents revealed that 51% had a bachelor's degree, 45% had a master's degree, and 4% had a doctorate. Eighty-eight of the respondents received their certification as part of their degree program, 6% received alternative certification, 3% only took the certification test, 1% had emergency certification, 1% were not certified, and 2% designated their certification as Other.

Band was the most commonly reported teaching area among respondents (37%), followed by choir (29%), general music (14%), orchestra (11%), and other (10%). Table 3 provides a comparison between the pre-college educational background of respondents and their current

teaching assignment. While 57% of respondents attended suburban schools and only 11% attended urban schools prior to college, currently 40% teach in urban schools and 38% teach in suburban schools.

Table 3

Pre-college training compared to current job assignment of respondents

Type of School	Pre-College Training % of Respondents	Current Job Assignment % of Respondents
Urban	11%	40%
Suburban	57%	38%
Rural	24%	16%
Private	5%	1%
Other	2%	4%
Home	1%	0%

Examination of job commitment revealed that 47% of respondents reported spending 1 to 2 non-required hours at their school each day, 40% reported 3 to 4 hours daily, and 10% reported spending 5 to 6 additional hours each day. Respondents stated they conduct after-school rehearsals, on average, 1 (14%), 2 (20%), 3 (16%), 4 (20%), up to 5 (21%) days a week, with 9% reporting no outside rehearsals. When asked how many years they plan to continue teaching, 96% of respondents stated that they plan to teach until retirement.

In an effort to determine what influenced respondents to persist in music education, they were provided a list of factors and were asked to rank their importance on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = least impact and 5 = greatest impact (see Table 4). The factors that were ranked the highest were student-centered: 1) make a difference in students' lives; 2) ability to inspire children; and 3) students accomplish musical goals. The two factors that had the least impact were record keeping and staff development provided by the school district.

Table 4

Rankings by factors impacting decision to persist as a music educator

Factor	Mean	Median	Mode
Make a Difference in Students' Lives	4.39	5	5
Ability to Inspire Children	4.25	4	4
Students Accomplish Musical Goals	4.03	4	4
Administrative Support	3.61	4	4
Adequate Teaching Resources	3.58	4	4
Non-ISD Professional Development	3.56	4	4
Adequate Facilities	3.40	4	4
Salary	3.26	3	3
Funding to Attending Conferences	3.02	3	3
Record Keeping	2.13	2	1
ISD Staff Development	2.10	2	1

Note. Ratings based on 5-point Likert scale (1 = Low Impact; 5 = High Impact).

To gain a clearer picture of their performance as a teacher, the respondents were asked to rank their level of proficiency in various skills pertinent to being a successful music educator (see Table 5). Organization was ranked highest, followed by knowledgeable about music, communication, and discipline/classroom management. Time management and stress management were ranked the lowest.

Table 5

Rankings by respondents' self-evaluation of teaching skills

Skill	Mean	Median	Mode
Organization	4.07	4	5
Knowledgeable about Music	4.33	4	4
Communication	4.23	4	4
Discipline/Classroom Management	4.15	4	4
Time Management	3.99	4	4
Stress Management	3.40	3	3

Note. Ratings based on 5-point Likert scale (1 = Low; 5 = High).

Personality and character traits were the focus of the final portion of the survey (see Table 6). The trait that received the highest rank order by participants was determined/persistent, followed closely by love and passion for teaching. Other traits ranking high included: sense of humor; caring; goal-oriented; compassionate; psychologically healthy; creative/resourceful; positive; energetic; flexible; and patient. Negative was the only characteristic that received a low ranking.

Table 6

Rankings by respondents' self-evaluation of character traits

Trait	Mean	Median	Mode
Determined/Persistent	4.57	5	5
Love and Passion for Teaching	4.55	5	5
Sense of Humor	4.47	5	5
Caring	4.45	5	5
Goal-Oriented	4.41	5	5
Compassionate	4.30	4	5
Psychologically Healthy	4.23	4	5
Creative/Resourceful	4.20	4	5
Positive	4.24	4	4
Energetic	4.13	4	4
Flexible	4.10	4	4
Patient	3.64	4	4
Negative	2.15	2	2

Note. Ratings based on 5-point Likert scale (1 = Low; 5 = High).

Discussion

While the attrition and migration rates of music educators are alarming, leaving school understaffed and diminishing the quality of education, it is heartening to note that 84% remain in the teaching profession each year. In terms of gender, this study reveals that more women than men tend to persist in music education. This is in contrast to studies of music teacher attrition that indicated that a significantly larger number of women than men intended to leave the profession (Killian & Baker, 2006; Madsen & Hancock, 2002).

Two important statistics to note are 31% of the participants had taught for 26 or more years and 40% of the respondents were 50 years of age or above, which places them either close to retirement age or eligible for retirement. While 96% of respondents stated that they plan to teach

until they retire, almost half of them are nearing that point in their career. This leads to another issue plaguing music education—retirement of qualified teachers, resulting in further teacher shortages.

The overall educational training of the respondents seemed to be above average, with 49% having graduate degrees. Further, the fact that 88% of respondents received their certification as part of university training is in keeping with research that indicates that music teachers with alternative certification tend to leave the profession at a much higher rate (Asmus, 2003). While the majority of respondents attended suburban schools (57%), most of the current job assignments were in urban schools (40%), which only 11% of respondents reported having attended prior to attending college. Research indicates that urban schools tend to have the highest attrition rates (Delgado, 1999; Hill, 2003; Quartz, 2003), yet the majority of the respondents were teaching urban populations, in spite of the fact that a small percentage had an urban educational background.

A further distinguishing trait of the respondents was their commitment to their job and the amount of time they worked beyond the requisite hours. Almost all of the respondents (97%) reported working, on average, anywhere from 1 to 6 hours per day outside of school hours. Further, 91% conducted after-school rehearsals from 1 to 5 days a week. The extra hours spent at school also represents additional interaction time with students (a critical motivating factor for respondents remaining in the teaching profession).

One of the overarching self-reported attributes of the respondents was their child-centered approach to education. The predominant factors impacting their decision to persist as a music educator were all focused on students: making a difference in students' lives; being able to inspire children; and seeing students accomplish musical goals. This is in keeping with the study conducted by Cutietta and Thompson (2000) that described veteran music educators as being "child-centered" in their approach to education. The next highest-ranking factor was administrative support, which is in keeping with previous studies pointing to the relationship between job satisfaction and support from administrators (Baker, 2007; Brewster & Railsback, 2001; Cutietta & Thompson, 2000; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Madsen & Hancock, 2002). Record keeping and staff development provided by the respondents' school districts had very little impact on retention, which seems to indicate that paperwork is not a strong detractor and district training is not a strong attractor.

Evaluation of teaching skills revealed that respondents ranked their organizational skills higher than being knowledgeable about music. Perhaps effective teaching occurs best when lessons, classrooms, and programs are well organized, in addition to providing the educator a working environment in which they experience less stress and thus are able to teach for a longer period of time. Stress management was the skill that respondents indicated was their weakest, so perhaps having strong organizational tools enables respondents to keep stress to a manageable level.

The character trait that superseded all others, according to the respondents' self-evaluation, was being determined and persistent. An additional characteristic which respondents ranked highly was being goal-oriented, an attribute of career music educators identified by Cutietta and Thompson (2000). It seems that these two traits are interrelated in that great determination is required to achieve goals, particularly when faced with some of the challenges unique to music educators. Love and passion for teaching was also ranked highly by respondents, which is a quality that is closely connected with a long-term commitment to any profession.

Results of the study suggest that career music educators remain in the profession because they are committed to having a positive impact on students' lives and because they possess the

unique skills and character traits essential to longevity in the teaching field. Essentially, music educators persist in teaching because of their self-determined and intrinsically motivated behaviors.

Because this study is limited to Texas, the results are indicative of a specific geographic region and are not necessarily representative of the national population of music educators. However, this study does provide some interesting and insightful information regarding the teachers who choose to make music education a life-long career.

References

- Asmus, E. (1999). The increasing demand for music teachers. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 8(2), 5-6.
- Asmus, E. P. (2003). Advantages and disadvantages of alternative certification. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 13(1), 5-6.
- Baker, V. D. (2007). Relationship between job satisfaction and the perception of administrative support among early career secondary choral music educators. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 17(1), 77-90.
- Brewster, C., & Railsback, J. (2001). *Supporting beginning teachers: How administrators, teachers and policymakers can help new teachers succeed*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Byo, J. L., & Cassidy, J. W. (2005). The role of the string project in teacher training and community music education. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 53(4), 332-347.
- Cutietta, R. A., & Thompson, L. K. (2000). Voices of experience speak on music teaching. *Music Educators Journal*, 87(3), 40-44.
- Delgado, M. (1999). Lifesaving 101: How a veteran teacher can help a beginner. *Educational Leadership*, 56(8), 27-29.
- Grissmer, D. W., & Kirby, S. N. (1997). Teacher turnover and teacher quality. *Teachers College Record*, 99, 45-56.
- Gruber, K., Willey, S. D., Broughman, S. P., Strizek, G. A., & Burian-Fitzgerald, M. (2002). *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000: Overview of the data for public, private, public charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs elementary and secondary schools (NCES 2002-313)*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Hancock, C. B. (2009). National estimates of retention, migration, and attrition. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 57(2), 92-107.
- Hancock, C. B. (2008). Music teachers at risk for attrition and migration: An analysis of the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 56, 130-144.
- Hill, W. L., Jr. (2003). The teacher shortage and policy. *Music Educators Journal*, 89(4), 6-7.
- Johnson, S. M., & Birkeland, S. (2003). Pursuing a "sense of success": New teachers explain their career decisions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 581-617.
- Killian, J. N., & Baker, V. D. (2006). The effect of personal and situational factors in the attrition and retention of Texas music educators. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 16(1), 41-54.
- Kimpton, J. (2005). What to do about music teacher education: Our profession at a crossroads. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 14(2), 8-21.
- Lindeman, C. A. (2004). Idea bank. *Music Educators Journal*, 90(3), 66-67.
- Madsen, C. K., & Hancock, C. B. (2002). Support for music education: A case study of issues concerning teacher retention and attrition. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 50(1), 6-19.
- McLain, B. P. (2005). *Environmental support and music teacher burnout*. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 164, 71-84.
- Podgursky, M., Monroe, R., & Watson, D. (2004). The academic quality of public school teachers: An analysis of entry and exit behavior. *Economics of Education Review*, 23, 507-518.
- Quartz, K. H. (2003). "Too angry to leave": Supporting new teachers' commitment to transform urban schools. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 54(2), 99-111.
- Russell, J. A. (2008). A discriminant analysis of the factors associated with the career plans of string music educators. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 56, 204-219.