

“Best Practices” for Designing Music Teacher Mentor Programs

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Friday, March 18, 2016

3:00 - 3:25 PM

2016 NAFME Music Research
and Teacher Education
National Conference

Overview and Status of Music Mentoring

Mentoring programs have the potential to:

- ▶ Aid novice teachers' confidence (Jonson, 2002)
- ▶ Increase these teachers' instructional impact (Sweeny, 2005)
- ▶ Boost motivation and confidence (Odell & Ferraro, 1992)

Additionally, such programs may help beginning music teachers with classroom management, administrative tasks, and selecting repertoire (Barnes, 2010; Conway, 2002; DeLorenzo, 1992)

Despite these potential benefits, only 36 states require mentoring programs of varied lengths for beginning music teachers (Baumgartner et al., 2015)

The Problem

To date, only 24 state music education associations (MEAs) sponsor mentoring programs for beginning music teachers (Baumgartner et al., 2015)

- ▶ MO, MI, NE are in a “pilot” phase of new MEA-sponsored mentoring programs

State MEAs (particularly those without beginning music teacher mentoring programs) would likely benefit from learning the “best practices” from states with such programs.

Purpose and Primary Research Questions

The purpose of this investigation was to provide the “best practices” of music-specific mentoring programs based on a thorough examination of the 24 states that currently offer MEA-sponsored programs for beginning music teachers.

1. What are the organizational/structural, logistical, and financial considerations in maintaining state MEA-sponsored mentoring programs?
2. What are the “best practices” for music mentoring programs?

Methodology

Participant Identification & Invitation

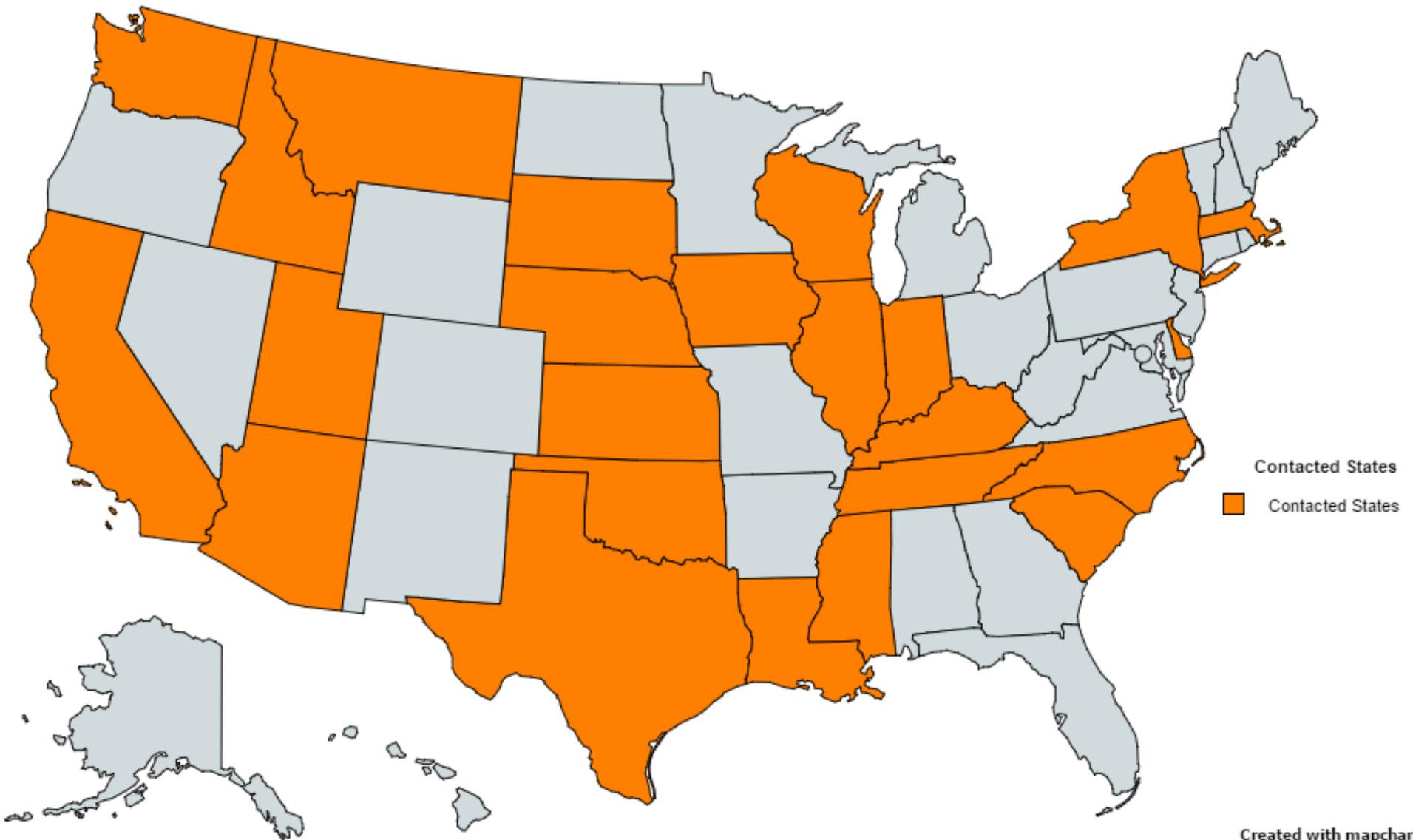
- ▶ Searched state MEA websites for mentor chairperson or state president
- ▶ Compiled into shared spreadsheet

Questionnaire

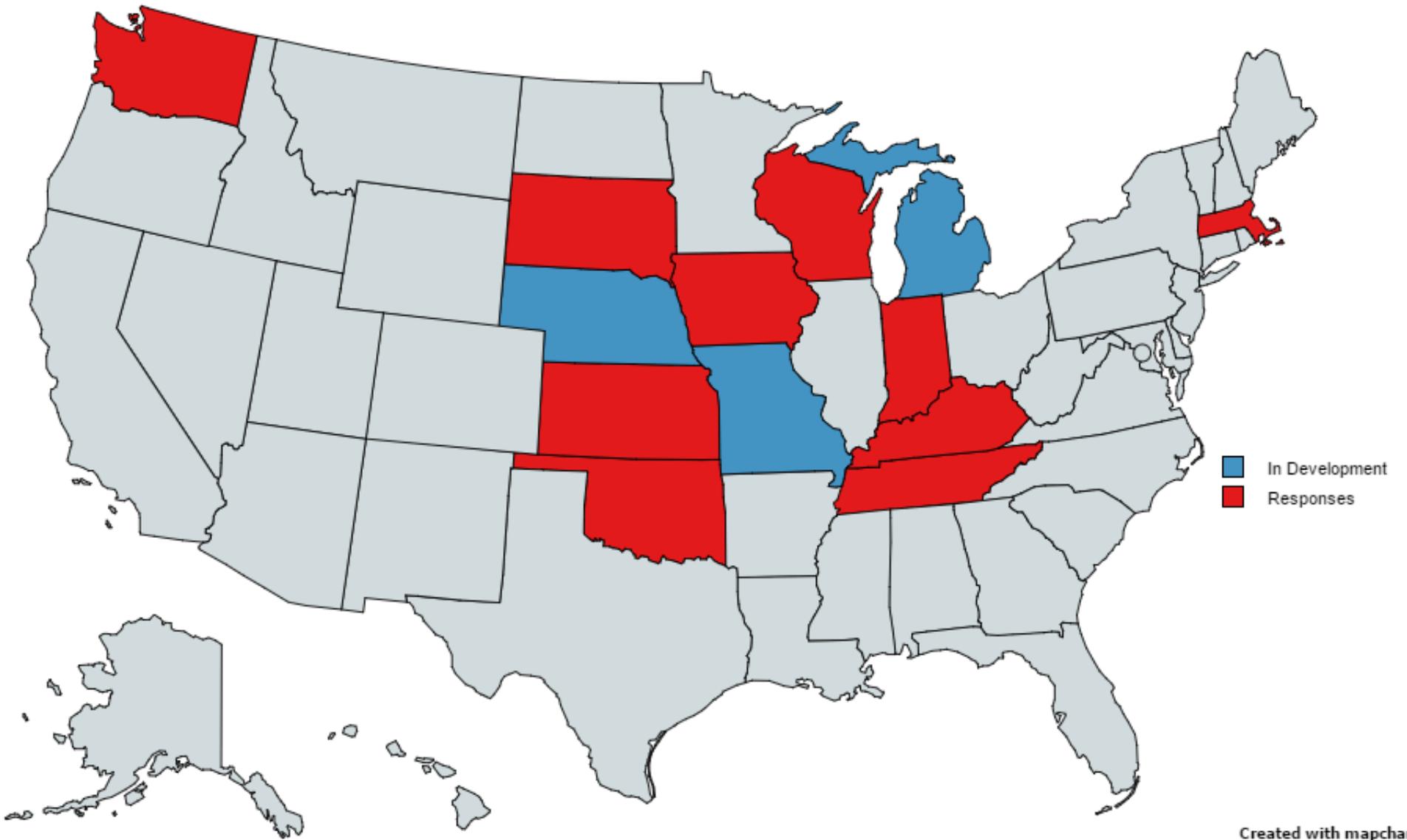
- ▶ Prompts derived from previous ASPA research findings on US mentoring programs (SMTE 2015)
- ▶ Invitation email sent, including link to Qualtrics “survey”
- ▶ Only 10 valid responses
 - ▶ 42% of the 24 states that advertise music MEA mentoring responded

Data Analysis

- ▶ 12 response categories divided among 5 researchers
- ▶ Holistic approach to coding responses (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014)



Contacted States
Contacted States



Participation in Mentor Programs

- ▶ Anyone can participate (WI, SD, OK, KS, MA)
- ▶ 1st or 2nd-year teachers (IA)
- ▶ 1st through 5th-year teachers (IN, WI)

*Participation in all mentor programs is voluntary.

Recruitment

Identification of New Teachers

- ▶ Regional MEA presidents
- ▶ Music education faculty/CNAfME chapters at universities
- ▶ Administrators

Recruitment of New Teachers

- ▶ State conferences
- ▶ Advertisements in state MEA publications
- ▶ Online (Facebook, State MEA websites)
- ▶ Direct contact via email/phone
- ▶ Word of mouth

Mentor Selection and Requirements

Overall, quite varied practices

- ▶ Retired music teachers are recommended (1 state) or selected (1 state)
- ▶ “Active music educators with strong programs are invited to participate” (1 state)
 - ▶ Who makes this “strong” determination?
- ▶ “Current music educators instead of retired teachers” (1)
- ▶ Current, experienced teachers apply (1 state)
 - ▶ OK band mentors are chosen from Phi Beta Mu...
- ▶ 5+ years (1 state) of teaching experience

Mentor Training

Indiana was the only state that reported mentor training

- ▶ “Day long workshop that is set up like a mini conference”
 - ▶ Mentees attend four sessions
 - ▶ Sessions on **instruction** (standards, assessment, rehearsal strategies), **classroom management**, **administrative tasks** (planning a trip, talking with administrators), and “**avoiding burnout**”
- ▶ No training (7 states)
 - ▶ No funding for training (mentioned once)
 - ▶ Phi Beta Mu in OK has mentor handbook for band mentors

Pairing Mentors with Mentees

State MEA mentor chairs ($n = 4$) or district/region chairpersons ($n = 3$) reported assigning mentor pairs.

Pairs usually assigned based on area of instruction (band/choir/string/general), geographic location (i.e., proximity of mentor to mentee), and sometimes personality.

Usually notified via email.

Distance Limitations & Communication

Most do not have a distance limitation; expect utilization of email, phone, or other communication.

- ▶ One respondent indicated a distance limitation

Apparent attempt to pair with those close by/within the district to facilitate classroom visits, in-person communication, etc.

Grant funding was secured to pay for mentor travel, lodging, and per diem ($n = 1$).

Support for Mentors Paired with Mentees

Most report not having a formal supervision or support system for mentors after being paired with mentees

Three reported having a state mentoring chairperson that checks in with mentors periodically

One reported an assigned mentoring supervisor that conducts a mid-term check and visit

One reported that support is available if needed, but no formal supervision or support process in place

Mentor Meeting Frequency

Most reported that meeting frequency is not monitored

One reported in the first year, four visits are required and in the second year, two visits are required

Two reported that although there are no set number of meeting times, it is suggested to meet three to four times per year

One reported that their mentor program is more like a professional development program; mentees can request observations and feedback, but it is not a formally established process

Mentoring Program Funding

Unfunded in most states; volunteer mentors (7 states)

Funding provided in two states (IN, IA)

- ▶ Grant allows for mentors to receive a \$125 stipend towards mileage, hotel (Iowa)
- ▶ Mentors are reimbursed for mileage, not time (Indiana)
 - ▶ Workshop costs are donated by a local travel company
 - ▶ Workshop is free for all who attend and includes free lunch

Other Logistical Elements that Aid Success

Volunteers that are “highly motivated to help each other” results in success

“Mini conventions” in some districts “allow for mentoring pairs to meet during the school year”

- ▶ Beginning music teachers also can attend two panel discussions at the KMEA In-Service Workshop
 - ▶ “Tips from the Trenches” and “How to Stay Organized Your First Year of Teaching”

\$250 in grant funding for beginning music teachers “to attend a music professional development conference of their choice”

- ▶ “Additionally, we have a fall symposium for the beginning teachers and their mentors”

Most Useful Aspects of MEA Mentoring Programs

(as determined by mentoring or MEA presidents)

Support system

- ▶ Reassure new new teachers that they are not alone
- ▶ Give new teachers a positive “ear” to support the challenges they face

Useful reference documents

- ▶ Conversation starters
- ▶ Calendars
- ▶ Timelines

“It’s working”

Variety and Flexibility of content

- ▶ “They get help in whatever area they find most useful”
- ▶ Variety

It’s Free for beginning music teachers!

Changes for the Better?

Training and workshops

- ▶ Formal training and workshops for mentors
- ▶ Workshops for mentors/protégés to get together

Organization and logistics

- ▶ Better feedback to organizers of the program from both mentors and protégés
- ▶ Departmentalize leadership team (band, orchestra, vocal, elementary)

Participation

- ▶ More universal participation - especially teachers in smaller/isolated districts
- ▶ Identify teachers considering leaving the profession and provide help, intervention incentives for participation

Discussion

We now have a more complete picture of what state MEAs are presently doing

- ▶ But these may not necessarily be “best practices” as compared to general education research and practitioner’s literature
- ▶ No response from 14 (58.3%) states...
 - ▶ Possible there are different practices not reported that would benefit new programs

Mentor Training

- ▶ Perhaps the most direct avenue for informing mentors of:
 - ▶ What beginning music teachers need (Barnes, 2010; Conway, 2002; DeLorenzo, 1992), and
 - ▶ How to most effectively address those needs in one-on-one mentoring meetings
- ▶ Only one state (Indiana) reported mentor training

Implications and Our Next Steps

Following up with states that did not complete our survey

ASPA “best practices” document and policy paper

- ▶ Document will outline what we know by topic area
 - ▶ To aid states without MEA mentoring to develop such programs
 - ▶ Future policy document to compare general education “best practices” vs. music education?

Exemplar music MEA mentoring programs:

- ▶ Iowa
 - ▶ Funding (via grants)
- ▶ Indiana
 - ▶ Training, funding, longitudinal (but optional) mentoring support

Specific content of mentor-mentee interactions, training
(program goals)

Thank You!

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<http://smte.us/aspas/supporting-beginning-music-teachers/>