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## Perspectives of Elementary General Music Teachers on Factors Influencing Student Participation in Secondary Music Ensembles

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A wide variety of factors contribute to student participation in secondary music ensembles. Factors standing outside of the school setting may include family socioeconomic status (SES) and parental influences. In a review of literature, Albert (2006a) reported on several studies showing how family SES affects student participation in instrumental ensembles at the secondary level. Lower SES students take part at a much lower rate than do higher SES students. Albert also found that greater degrees of parental support were closely associated with student participation in instrumental music programs in middle school. Kinney (2010) found that students who live with both parents are more likely to initially enroll and continue studying music in band programs. This study also suggested that single parents have a difficult time scheduling several extracurricular activities thus resulting in a lower participation rate. Furthermore, results of a survey of undergraduate music education majors conducted by Mizener (2006) indicated that parents had a strong influence on the decision of students to study music in college.

Within the school setting, the issues of administrative support of the music program, vertical alignment of the music curriculum, and recruitment efforts of ensemble directors may influence decisions to participate in secondary music activities. Abril and Gault (2007) conducted a study examining perspectives on the school music program, focusing on the community and administrators. They found that even though administrators value music education, they sometimes give priority to other subjects. Studies by Smith (1997) and Corenblum and Marshall (1998) found a close relationship between the SES of families within a school and level of administrative support for instrumental music programs. Thus, the SES of families of students within a school seems to influence the access students have to music activities.

A second school-related factor is vertical curriculum alignment. Curriculum alignment has many facets. The term often refers to the relationships between the curriculum as it is

documented in materials from national, state, and local agencies and the content as teachers actually teach it, and then the relationships between the content of instruction and the areas of content that are assessed. Glatthorn (1999) and Squires (2009) both observed that planning close connections among the written curriculum, instruction, and assessment can be very effective, as evidenced in improved standardized test scores, under certain circumstances.

Vertical alignment, one of several aspects of curriculum alignment, is the practice of purposely designing the curriculum for a particular academic area so objectives and learning activities are coordinated and lead to the accomplishment of a set of mutual goals. Schielack and Seeley (2010) noted that in mathematics, when teachers communicate across grade levels to understand the content and processes of instruction at all levels, students move from level to level more successfully. Furthermore, a successful transition from elementary math to middle school math builds a foundation for greater achievement at the high school level. Because the elementary music program is typically the first opportunity a student has for formal music study, its strength may play an important role in a student's decision to pursue further musical studies.

Recruitment is still another in-school factor related to participation in secondary instrumental ensembles. Recruiting efforts draw many participants to bands, orchestras, and choirs in the secondary schools. The directors must actively make their programs visible to potential new members. Nierman and Veak (1997) found that participatory recruiting techniques on the elementary level, including recorder lessons and instrument "petting zoos," resulted in increased numbers of students expressing interest in participating in band. They also observed that recruiting activities were most effective when held in close proximity to the date on which a student registers for band. Albert (2006b) found that performances by the middle school band for the elementary students as well as visits to the middle school by the elementary students were effective recruiting strategies. In addition, any means of increasing visibility of the band program, including clothing printed with the name of the band, community performances, and recordings, resulted in greater participation in the program.

From within the school, another potential influence on secondary ensemble participation is the elementary general music program and the music teacher. This influence may sometimes be overlooked as factors in decisions to participate in music after the elementary years. There is, however, evidence that elementary music experiences do affect the desire to participate in music activities after the elementary grades. In a study of factors influencing choir participation, Mizener (1991) found that among fifth- through eighth-graders, loving to sing and enjoying choir-related activities are the strongest factors related to wanting to join a choir. The study suggests that elementary music teachers can foster a positive attitude toward choir and encourage students to continue their music participation by selecting attractive musical materials and by providing opportunities to take part in musical performances. Similarly, a summary of data from a survey performed by Child Trends (2010), a research organization, observed that support for music in the elementary and middle schools is critical to student participation in music activities through high school and into adulthood.

Because of the small amount of research regarding the influence of the elementary general music teacher on student participation in music after elementary school, it seemed appropriate to explore some aspect of the effect of the elementary music teacher on student participation in secondary music ensembles. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to consider characteristics of elementary general music teachers and their views of factors influencing students to take part in secondary music programs, including their own influence and characteristics of their music programs. Factors investigated in this survey included, but were not limited to, teacher certification, curriculum alignment, and secondary ensemble recruitment.

The following research questions concerning selected characteristics of elementary general music programs and music teachers' perspectives of them guided this study:

1. What is the typical teaching situation of a teacher responding to the survey in this study?
2. What are the qualifications of teachers responding to the survey, and what are some of their routine instructional practices?
3. To what extent does the district music program employ vertical curriculum alignment between the elementary and secondary levels?
- 4a. To what extent do secondary ensemble directors recruit at the elementary level?
- 4b. In the estimation of the study participants, what portion of their students go on to participate in secondary music programs?
5. How do elementary general music teachers perceive the relationship between their qualifications and experiences and student participation in secondary ensembles?

## Method

A comprehensive survey was developed and sent to 195 elementary general music teachers in Southeast Texas. All elementary music teachers surveyed were active members of the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) Regions 10, 19, or 23. Of the 195 e-mail addresses used, 10 addresses were invalid or no longer usable, leaving 185 survey requests sent. Respondents were given two months to complete and return the survey, with e-mail reminders sent every two weeks. There was a 51.9% ( $n = 96$ ) rate of return. The educators also had the option of requesting the survey results when completed, with 20 choosing to do so. The survey was developed and sent out via Survey Monkey, an online survey service, and can be found at [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com).

The survey contained a demographic section with 11 questions pertaining to the teaching position and school district. The 15 questions of the second section concerned the respondents' teaching beliefs, philosophies, and practices. Question formats included multiple choice, short answer, and open response.

Data gathered through multiple choice questions were presented in frequencies and percentages. Short answers and open responses were analyzed and placed into categories according to emerging themes.

## Results

The first section of the survey contained demographic questions revealing that the typical teaching situation is in an urban setting, the teacher has 15 or more years of experience, and he or she teaches elementary general music to 100-150 children every day. The respondents provided the name of the school in which they were currently employed and the name of the city or town in which their school was located. The respondents then indicated if their school were classified as "urban" (40.6%), "suburban" (37.5%), "rural" (12.5%), or "other" (9.4%). The educators who chose to expand upon their answer in the "other" category listed characteristics such as inner city, urban students living in the suburbs, and lower income suburban in a non-typical suburban setting.

When asked to indicate the number of years of teaching experience, the majority of respondents listed 15 or more years (50%), followed by 0-3 years (15.6%), then 6-10 years (14.6%), 10-15 years (12.5%), and finally 3-6 years (7.3%) (See Figure 1).

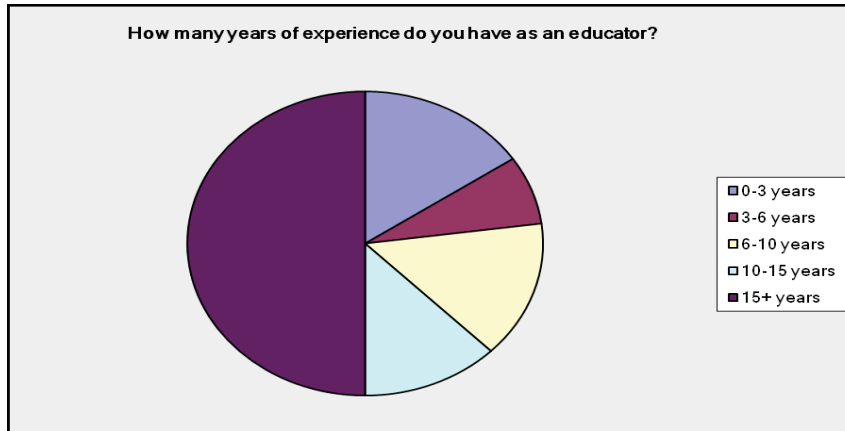


Figure 1. Number of years of teaching experience.

Next, the respondents provided their current teaching assignment. The greater part of them listed elementary general music (92%). A small number of participants indicated elementary choir (4.2%) or middle school choir (2.1%). Other assignments listed by individuals included beginning band, elementary orchestra, elementary art, and elementary band.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the approximate number of students taught in a typical school day. The largest number of students taught per day was 100-150 (38%), followed by 151-200 (18.8%), then 201-300, and 301-430 were equal (11.6%) and finally 25-100 (9.4%).

The final question in the demographics section of the survey asked the educators for anything they would like to add about their particular situation. Several of the answers involved multiculturalism and the many combinations of ethnicity among their students, levels of socioeconomic standing, and school funding. These responses will be examined further in the discussion section of this paper.

The second section of the survey related to the teachers' educational beliefs and instructional practices and to the administrative policies of the district. The second research question concerned the qualification and experience of the participants and their routine instructional practices. Briefly, the majority of the respondents hold Texas certification in music, grades EC-12, and they earned it in a traditional university certification program. For most, elementary general music is their preferred area of teaching. They most often use teacher observation of classroom activities and oral tests for assessment. They implement the TEKS in their instruction on a regular basis, with their supervisors encouraging them to do so frequently. Singing, playing instruments, and moving are the most frequent activities in the music classroom.

Respondents listed their qualifications and certifications for teaching in the classroom, with several listing more than one certification. The majority of respondents (60.4%) indicated Texas certification EC-12 music. Two educators indicated the same certification from Missouri. The remaining answers were split among elementary general classroom (18.7%), Kodály (5.2%), and early childhood ESL (5.2%). Several certifications were given by small numbers of respondents (one to three), such as special education, Orff, Nebraska general music, K-8 self-contained classroom, Michigan general music, principal, secondary math, K-12 Art, 4-8 grade generalist,

ESL supplemental, superintendent, life/earth science and geology, K-8 grade theatre, learning resource specialist, and none.

The majority of respondents (81.3%) specified traditional university college of education certification, whereas others indicated an alternative certification course (18.8%). The 18 individuals who indicated alternative certification named the course through which they received certification. Educational service centers in two regions, two school districts, two universities, and three commercial alternative certification programs provided certification training to the teachers.

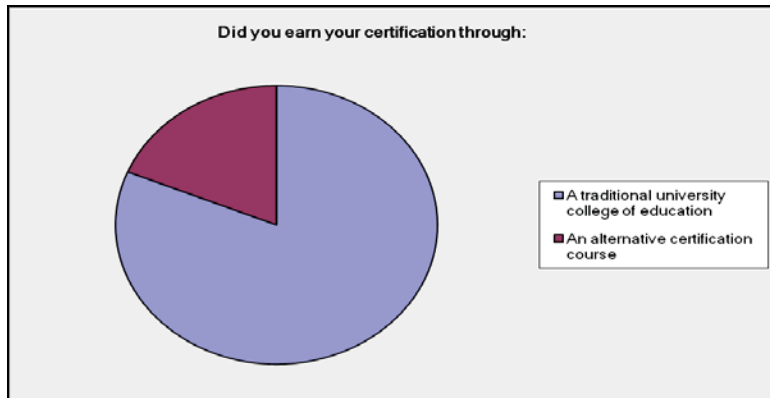


Figure 2. Source of teacher certification

When asked if they felt comfortable teaching their subject area and level, educators ranked their top three teaching preferences, with “one” being the first choice. The options included “elementary general music,” “sixth- through eighth-grade band,” “sixth- through eighth-grade choir,” or “sixth- through eighth-grade orchestra;” “ninth- through twelfth-grade band,” “ninth- through twelfth-grade choir,” or “ninth- through twelfth-grade orchestra;” and “other.” A clear majority of participants preferred elementary general music (87%), with sixth- through eighth-grade band (15.6%) the second preference, and sixth- through eighth-grade orchestra (3.1%) as the third preference. Responses in the “other” category (23.9%) included music history, music theory, general classroom, and college.

How elementary general music teachers assess their students was one of the instructional practices explored. The educators marked their preferred methods of assessment, with more than one option possible. The majority of respondents (97.5%) chose “teacher observation of classroom activities” as the favorite method of assessment. “Formal performances,” was chosen by more than half of the participants (54.8%). Approximately 1/3 of the participants (32.9%) used “oral tests.” Other options included “written tests,” “prepared worksheets,” and “district-specified assessments of objectives included in the district curriculum goals.”

Implementation of the TEKS in the classroom was examined as well. Educators were asked to what degree their supervisor (principal, fine arts supervisor, or mentor teacher) encouraged them to implement the TEKS. Respondents chose “frequently” (62.2%), “occasionally” (17.1%), “infrequently” (13.4%), or “not at all” (7.3%). When asked to what degree they implemented the TEKS in classroom instruction, participants responded overwhelmingly with “frequently” (92.7%). Smaller numbers of respondents selected “occasionally” (6.1%), and “infrequently” (1.2%), and no one chose the option “not at all.”

Respondents ranked music activity choices in the order of importance, with more than one activity usable at the same rank (see Figure 3). The top-ranked activity was “singing,” chosen by a majority of respondents (85.3%). “Playing instruments” was the second choice, selected by about a third of the respondents (34.1%), and about a third of the respondents selected “movement” (31.7%) as the third choice. Other choices were “listening to musical literature,” “reading and writing music,” and “creating music through improvising and composing.”

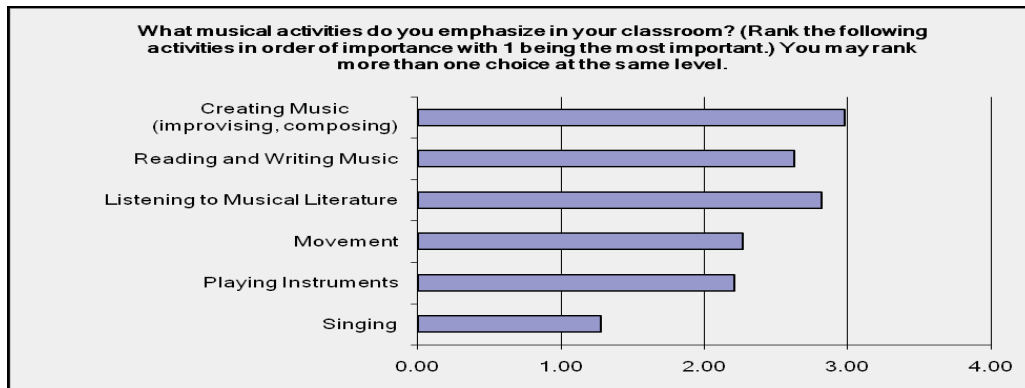


Figure 3. Rank order of reported classroom musical activities emphasis

Vertical alignment between the elementary music program and the secondary music program was the subject of the third research question. In summary, most respondents indicated that there was no formal vertical alignment. Of those replying that the elementary and secondary programs were vertically aligned, the majority said that there was no regular discussion of the objectives between elementary and secondary teachers. Most respondents also thought that the programs were not aligned informally, but in the open responses, several participants observed that if teachers base instruction on the TEKS, then vertical alignment from level to level automatically takes place.

Educators indicated if the overall elementary music program were officially vertically aligned with the secondary program. The answers were “no” (58.5%), and “yes” (41.5%). If the respondents answered “yes,” they were then asked if the alignment objectives were discussed regularly between elementary and secondary teachers. Again, the results favored “no” (69.4%) over “yes” (30.6%). The last survey question in the area of vertical alignment concerned unofficial alignment between elementary and secondary music programs. The majority (55.6%) believed their programs were either not aligned or aligned very little with the secondary music program. Only a small number of respondents (23%) believed their programs were aligned unofficially.

In questions related to vertical alignment, the survey asked about implementation of district guidelines for fine arts and what courses were being offered to meet these guidelines. In open-ended responses, educators indicated to what degree they implemented the goals, objectives, and activities specified in the district curriculum guide. The replies varied widely, with several educators indicating they were not aware of any district curriculum guide; therefore they were not required to follow it. Others, however, stated they were strongly encouraged to follow their guide. Respondents who were aware of a curriculum guide indicated their willingness to follow it as well as encouragement by their supervisors to do so “frequently” if not “daily.”



The next survey question asked what fine arts courses were offered to students in junior high or middle school to meet the one-credit junior high fine arts requirement. Respondents could select more than one course. The most common answer was “band” (64.6%), followed closely by “choir” (61%), then “orchestra” (37.8%), “theatre arts” and “drama” (35.3%), “art” (34.1%), “unknown” (19.5%), “dance” (9.8%), “general music” (9.8%) and “other.”

The perceptions of elementary general music teachers regarding how many students continue participating in secondary music programs were then addressed in the survey (See Figure 4). The largest portion of respondents (41.5%) estimated that 26-50% of their elementary music students participate in secondary music programs. Smaller numbers of respondents chose 0-25% (28%), 51-75% (23.2%) and 76-100% (7.3%).

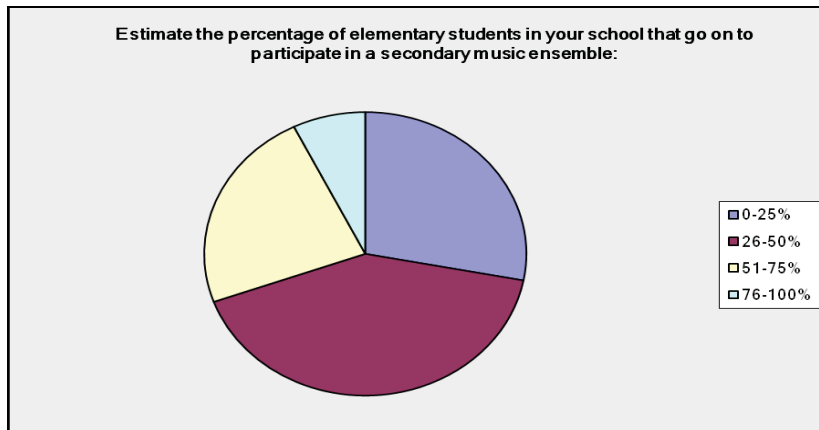


Figure 4. Estimate of secondary music participation

The next topic of discussion in the research questions was recruitment. Most teachers said there was a recruiting program in their school districts, band was the strongest recruiting area, and that recruiting efforts were effective, ranging from “somewhat” to “very.” Respondents were asked if the secondary ensembles in their districts had a systematic program of recruitment in the elementary school. Most respondents chose “yes” (57.3%) with the remaining respondents choosing “no” (42.7%). The educators were then asked which secondary ensemble recruited most actively. The answers ranked in order were “band” (48%), “choir” (18%), “none” (14%), “equal” (8%), “orchestra” (6%) and “not sure” or “don’t know” (6%). The educators then indicated the effect recruitment efforts had on student participation in a secondary ensemble. The answers were “somewhat effective” (42.7%), “very effective” (32.9%), “slightly effective” (15.9%), and “not effective” (8.5%).

The final research question dealt with the relationship between the elementary general music teachers’ qualifications and experiences and student participation in secondary ensembles. Respondents indicated whether they believed there was a relationship between the two factors. The open-ended responses could be categorized into “agree” (74.4%), “unsure” (6.1%), and “disagree” (3.7%). Finally, respondents were asked if they would like to add anything more about the relationships between elementary general music teachers and secondary ensemble participation. There were forty responses, which will be discussed in detail in the discussion section of this paper.

## Discussion

When educators were asked to describe their schools, over 75% indicated either “urban” or “suburban.” The location of a school district often determines the variety and quantity of resources available to the schools and the conditions under which students and teachers learn and teach. For example, students who attend urban or suburban school districts have opportunities that rural students may not have, whereas students in rural schools may experience a less threatening environment than those in urban schools.

Half of the respondents indicated fifteen or more years of teaching experience. Perhaps less experienced teachers, those with fewer than three years of experience, were not as interested or did not have the available time to complete the survey. The more experienced teachers may have had a deeper understanding of the importance of the influence of elementary music experiences on later participation in musical activities.

The final question in the demographics section of the survey asked if there were anything the respondents would like to add about their teaching situation. Several responses were associated with the SES of the students. Many teachers listed factors such as working-class Latino students, Title I school classification, gang-related areas, at-risk students, multilingual students, and an insufficient number of music teachers for the size of the school. The fact that teachers felt the need to include factors about their schools that were not obvious to the general public indicated that these teachers considered economic factors important in dealing with students. The economic surroundings can greatly influence activities in a music classroom.

When asked to list their teaching certifications and qualifications, over half of the respondents listed a certification in EC-12 music, indicating that the majority of elementary general music teachers are highly qualified. Other certifications were also listed, such as administrator, math, art, life science, resource specialist, and elementary general classroom, which indicate that not all teachers in a fine arts class are teaching in their primary area of expertise. Whereas the majority of fine arts teachers are teaching in their area of specialization, it is not uncommon to see others in the classroom as well.

Another area examined by this survey was teaching preference. Respondents were asked to rank their top three teaching preferences. A strong majority ( $n = 84$ ) listed elementary general music as first choice. This suggests that the majority of the respondents were teaching their preferred subject area. It seems that most respondents prefer to teach the younger-aged students compared to the high school level students. In the “other” category, several respondents listed teaching older students only if necessary.

Respondents were asked to choose which methods of assessment they preferred. Teacher observation of student participation in classroom activities was the most common. This suggests that educators make daily participation an important criterion in grading. Oral testing, another category of classroom participation, was also a preferred assessment used by the respondents.

The survey also asked which musical activities were emphasized in the classroom. Singing, playing instruments and movement were all considered important. These activities are not sit-down activities and encourage complete and active participation by the students. It is certainly easiest to grade these activities through a daily participation grade rather than through written tests or worksheets. Creating music, a higher-order thinking skill, was the least emphasized



activity in the classroom. Educators often regret not spending enough time on creating music, perhaps due to its time-consuming nature and to the teachers' lack of preparation or understanding regarding teaching composition and improvisation in music.

Many respondents viewed vertical alignment between the elementary and secondary music programs as a positive concept. In elementary general music, as in other subject areas, the subject matter should be presented in a sequential manner, a practice that can prepare students for participation in secondary ensembles. If educators value vertical alignment, why did the majority of respondents answer that their program was aligned neither officially nor unofficially with the secondary music program and that alignment objectives were not discussed regularly among teachers? This could be due to a lack of communication between directors or administrators or to a lack of enforcement of an aligned curriculum by the immediate supervisors.

There appears to be a discrepancy between what educators want and what educators are going to do for the good of their students. Several educators indicated, however, that as long as the TEKS are followed, vertical alignment within the district should fall into place. The question then becomes one of teacher evaluation by the administrators to be sure the TEKS are being followed. Educators seem to value vertical curriculum alignment, but there is often no follow-through either by the elementary or the secondary directors.

Implementation of the TEKS in the musical classroom must be enforced by administrators as well as by the music teacher. When asked to what degree does the supervisor encourage the implementation of the TEKS, most respondents answered "frequently." A large majority of the survey participants also responded "frequently" when asked to what degree they implemented the TEKS in classroom instruction. If the respondents claim high TEKS implementation, why is vertical alignment not stronger? Weak vertical alignment could be the result of little follow-through regarding curriculum implementation. The respondents were then asked to what degree the goals in the district curriculum guide were implemented. This question was answered indirectly, with educators choosing to focus on the lack of a known district curriculum guide. The Texas Education Agency (TEA), Texas education's governing state agency, requires the use of a district curriculum guide for each district. Several of the respondents indicated a willingness to use a district guide if one were available but did not know of one.

Investigating student participation in secondary ensembles after completing elementary school is one of the purposes of this study. In an essay format, participants answered in an essay format whether they believed a relationship exists between the qualifications, experience, and teaching skills of the elementary music teacher and participation in secondary ensembles. Very few respondents answered "no." Several respondents expanded upon their answers by writing about characteristics that contribute to a positive experience in their classrooms. Teacher enthusiasm, self-confidence, and a love for music were mentioned frequently. Having a positive experience in the elementary music classroom was also cited as a major contribution to secondary participation. Respondents believed that personally making an extra effort to promote secondary ensemble participation made a difference in the future decisions of their students.

With educators encouraging student participation, secondary recruitment is the next step. When asked if the secondary ensembles in their district have a systematic program of recruitment, over half of the respondents answered "yes." Of the respondents, a large majority felt that recruitment efforts were either "somewhat effective" or "very effective." These percentages may actually be low because they are based on the perceptions of the elementary teacher and not on actual enrollment figures. Respondents also felt that the band programs recruited most actively. There was a gap between the recruitment efforts of band and choir,

which could explain the lower degree of secondary participation in vocal ensembles compared to instrumental. The attraction of using new instruments rather than singing every day, an activity respondents claim to use frequently, could be another factor contributing to greater participation in band.

Educators were asked if there were anything they would like to add about the relationships between elementary general music and secondary ensemble participation. The responses were gathered in essay form and categorized according to content. Educators were firm in the belief that if a solid musical foundation, either through enjoyment or enthusiasm, were provided, students would be successful and would desire to continue studying secondary music. Elementary music teachers provide their students with their first exposure to a music classroom, which can set the students up for success or failure. If a student has a negative experience at the elementary level, that student may not be willing to participate in secondary music despite the level of recruitment efforts in place.

Respondents also expressed concern over the lack of vertical alignment between elementary and secondary ensembles, citing communication as an essential tool for success. Vertical alignment was recognized as weak in an earlier section of this survey. Since the majority of respondents listed fifteen or more years of teaching experience, the lack of communication among music educators should be taken seriously. Younger educators may be more interested in logistical concerns while older educators are traditionally concerned with the betterment of their students, having already mastered fundamental teaching skills. It is clear that vertical alignment and communication among educators in a given district is often seen as limited and must be improved.

Results of this survey reveal a high level of concern and involvement among elementary general music teachers regarding the participation of their students in music activities in middle school and high school. Elementary music teachers are interested in the entire music program in their districts. They have connections with their students that can benefit music participation at all levels. It would be a great advantage for secondary ensemble directors to establish working partnerships with elementary music teachers and for curriculum directors and music supervisors to facilitate the formal development of the music program across all grades.

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