

A Hopeful Future for Music Education

Editor's Note: With the financial challenges of the past year, we are grateful TMEA could offer a consistent level of scholarship funding for our future music educators this year. You can see the full list of scholarship recipients on page 33. One element in the scholarship application is an essay that describes the applicant's reasons for

becoming a teacher, commitment to music education, and future career goals. This year, two essays stood out with our reviewers. We are pleased to share them with you. The writings of these future educators offer hope for the continued advancement of our profession and for future music students.

Helping Students Find Their Voice Through Music

By Wesley Wynn, Bill Cormack Scholarship Recipient

Growing up taking care of a physically disabled mother introduced me to a lot of hardships early in life. I was forced to grow up fast as, since my father recently passed away, I was responsible for walking to the grocery store for my family, cooking, cleaning, taking care of our dogs, and much more.

One of the escapes I had from my dwindling home life was the band hall. In the band hall I was free to be a kid again, hang out with friends, and make the music that I loved to make. It was a safe space where I knew Mr. Akande, my band director, would be there for me when I needed him. He regularly supported me by buying me food when I was hungry, buying me a backpack when mine busted and I didn't have the money to replace it, and being the mentor I most desperately needed. I went to him for advice and for an escape from all the adulting that was asked of me at home. He is the reason I changed my mind about pursuing band past middle school. If it weren't for him, I would've let my counselor talk me out of band, and that would've been the end of my story.

Mr. Akande is the reason I am pursuing music education today. I want to be there for kids when they need someone, and I want to be a part of what makes kids love music. For two years I have been a proud section leader for my school's clarinet section. This position has allowed me to "dip my toes" in the waters of music education. Being a section leader has introduced me to many opportunities to help teach music to my peers, only strengthening my passion to pursue music education upon graduation. I would one day like to have my own clarinet studio, where I could teach kids not only how to play the notes on the page, but also how to feel and interpret them at the same time. There's more to music than just

playing what's on the page and that's something I want to stress heavily in my future teaching career.

I would like to see more emphasis on diversity in teaching. I want to emphasize the importance of each musician having a unique voice. My goal with my students will be to help them discover and develop their own musical voices, rather than requiring them to comply with what I believe sounds best.

Everyone has a vision for what they want their future to look like, and my vision involves teaching kids how to develop their own musical personality and helping create the next generation of musicians.

Wesley Wynn is a senior at McNeil HS (Round Rock ISD). He plans to major in music education at a Texas university.

Fostering an Inclusive Music Education Experience for All

By Nathan Kock, Student Teacher Scholarship Recipient

Ivividly remember the first time I was asked, "Why do you want to teach music?" When posed with that daunting question, my ninth-grade-self responded, "Well, because I enjoy it—it's a passion of mine." I could not have known at the time that the process of becoming a music educator would require an extensive journey of self-discovery, personal growth, and unexpected challenges. What I have learned from participating in music has allowed me to confront obstacles that have arisen and strive toward a career in teaching music. My philosophy of music education centers around guiding young students toward becoming better people and better professionals and providing them significant musical experiences.

Countless studies prove that access to proper funding for schools is linked with positive outcomes in student performance. For many growing up in areas of lower socioeconomic status, like I did in the border town of Laredo, quality music education with adequate resources (such as new instruments, private lessons, AP Music Theory classes, etc.) can unfortunately be seen as a privilege, only accessible to those who can afford it. As part of an immigrant family, I personally understand the obstacles and socioeconomic barriers more often faced by minority groups.

I began to realize how these issues translated to music students in areas of low SES during my first TMEA Convention in 2016, when I sat first chair in the bass clarinet section for the 6A All-State Symphonic Band. As my surrounding peers began naming prolific musicians such as principals of their local symphonies and collegiate professors under whom they had studied, a generative question came to mind. Although we were running the same race and making the best of our unique situations, did we all start from the same place? Sixty percent of the students at my high school had been on free/reduced lunch, and our band program did not have access to resources that would be considered part of a quality music education. Due to a scarcity in funding, my first opportunity to learn from an applied lesson instructor was when I entered the music education program at the University of North Texas. This inequality is one of the main reasons I decided to pursue education, and it inspired me to form one of my priorities as a music educator: to provide a music education experience that is inclusive for students of all backgrounds.

I aspire to work in a public school and eventually teach at the college level, where I will prioritize recruiting from and serving students in lower SES communities who may not see music as a viable profession in which they can succeed. Every student has a right to a high-quality music education, and it is our responsibility as music educators to provide these opportunities, lead by example, and foster an inclusive and welcoming environment.

I wish to set a positive example for my future students through service and pursuit of musical excellence. As a music education and clarinet performance double major at the University of North Texas, I have purposefully chosen to serve in diverse organizations and improve my own musicianship. I won fourth at the International Clarinet Association Young Artists Competition where I was named a finalist, and I was selected to perform as an undergraduate student in the University of North Texas Wind Symphony under the direction of Eugene Migliaro Corporon. I currently serve as a woodwind technician at the economically and racially diverse Braswell HS in Denton ISD, and I volunteer on Saturday mornings as an instructor for "Start Up the Band!" This is a Title I program designed to provide fifth-grade students who would not otherwise pursue musical study with free instruments, materials, and instruction.

I have treasured these opportunities to work with students and be able to personally relate to the unique challenges they face in today's culture. At the university level, I serve as an undergraduate representative on the Dean's Student Advisory Committee, and I have proposed curricular revisions to help future generations of preservice educators. I also serve as head music librarian for the North Texas Wind Studies program, preparing and distributing music for over 600 undergraduate and graduate wind and percussion students in seven large ensembles.

I am greatly looking forward to student-teaching this spring, where I will discover more ways I can give back to the community of students and families. It was knowledgeable and caring music educators who helped me become the person I am today, and I wish to provide similar experiences for my students. I currently work three jobs to support myself while in school, but I hope to devote as much time as possible to my cooperating teacher and students in the spring. This TMEA scholarship will provide much needed financial assistance that will allow me to focus on learning and growing as an educator while setting a positive example for students at my teaching placement. ❏

Nathan Kock is a senior music education and clarinet performance major at the University of North Texas. He student-teaches at Eastern Hills HS and Handley MS Bands in Fort Worth ISD with cooperating teachers Derek Smilowski and David Carlsen, who consistently demonstrate what it means to advocate for students in Title I schools and how to foster an inclusive music education experience for all.

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