

Professional Development: Opportunity for Growth

Thomas H. Waggoner

Music educators in Texas are very fortunate to be able to experience and to participate in a myriad of professional development opportunities offered by campuses, school districts, colleges/universities, and, particularly, state associations, such as the Texas Bandmasters Association (TBA). Professional development is a continual process of enabling teachers to define direction and to implement change in their music programs. Professional development is essential for setting and achieving new goals, such as the student expectations prescribed in the Fine Arts Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for Music. As we are all aware, the TEKS are the state-mandated learning standards that describe what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Senate Bill (SB) 815, which was enacted by the 78th Legislature in 2003 and was effective as of the 2003-04 school year, mandates, as a matter of accreditation, that school districts must utilize the TEKS when providing instruction in all of the required curriculum (foundation and enrichment content areas), including music/fine arts. The TEKS are no longer

simply “guidelines” for enrichment content areas. This legislation is now reflected in Section 28.002(c) of the Texas Education Code and has been incorporated into Chapter 74 of the Texas Administrative Code by the State Board of Education.

Some professional development activities relate to all teachers, but music teachers benefit from additional programs that specifically address music content and the particular concerns of music educators. *The TBA clinics that are held throughout each year at various locations in the state serve as excellent professional development opportunities* for Texas band directors, so be sure to visit the TBA website to peruse the six clinics being offered during the 2006-07 school year. *Although workshops and presentations are still the predominant mode of professional development for teachers, the definition of professional development has expanded to include activities such as developing curricula, mentoring beginning teachers, scoring student or teacher performance assessments, and serving on district and/or state standards committees.*

Administrators and teachers should strive to incorporate this broader definition of professional development into their programs.

Effective professional development programs, such as the TBA clinics mentioned above, contain practical knowledge that directly impacts student learning and provide specific models and approaches for teaching the TEKS. Professional growth activities should be carefully developed to emphasize scaffolded curricula targeting specific music content at each grade level. Professional development should also provide ongoing assessment strategies that emphasize student achievement and critical and creative thinking processes. Models of excellence inspire music teachers to try new ideas and to grow professionally. Ideally, master teachers with expertise in the teaching areas of their audience share and teach their effective techniques. Professional development is critical for the growth and development of band programs in Texas schools. Campuses, school districts, colleges/universities, and state and national music associations offer numerous music workshops and clinics, often for Continuing Professional Education (CPE)

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credit, which has been required by the state since 1999 for teacher certification renewal every five years. Campuses and school districts should support continuing professional development by providing release time and funding for music teachers to build their knowledge and skills.

In addition to the exemplary workshops, clinics, and performances offered by TBA, the annual Texas Fine Arts Summit, which is hosted by the Center for Educator Development in Fine Arts (CEDFA), is also highly recommended as a professional development opportunity for Texas band directors. The Fine Arts Summit is unique in that it is the only major venue in Texas that brings together educators from all four fine arts content areas (music, art, dance, and theatre) and grade levels. CEDFA was originally established and funded by the Texas Education Agency in 1998 to support implementation of the Fine Arts TEKS in Texas schools. Since 1998, however, CEDFA and the Fine Arts Summit initiative have experienced tremendous growth, and, as a result, CEDFA has recently become a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

The recent Texas Fine Arts Summit VII held in Austin on June 8-9 at the Austin Airport Hilton Hotel, was another great success. The theme of the 2006 Summit was *TAK=S_*: *Through the Arts Knowledge becomes Success*. This was the second year of a four year Summit cycle of supporting implementation of the above-mentioned SB 815

that mandates instruction based upon the Fine Arts TEKS, particularly as related to how fine arts instruction enhances student achievement on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Attendees at the Summit learned how to 1) enable students to achieve mastery of TAKS objectives

through the Fine Arts TEKS; 2) integrate the Fine Arts TEKS and other academic subject areas with specific focus on TAKS objectives while maintaining the integrity of each discipline; and 3) improve presentation skills to become strong presenters, group leaders, and trainers.

At last year's 2005 Summit, music was paired with mathematics. At this year's 2006 Summit, music was paired with social studies. After the four year Summit cycle, music and the other three fine arts content areas of art, dance, and theatre will have been paired with each of the four foundation content areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The outstanding presenters for the secondary Music/Social Studies sessions were Diana Flores, Director of Bands at Plummer Middle School

in the Aldine Independent School District (ISD), and Elfida Martinez, Social Studies teacher at Plummer Middle School. Dr. Jeff Laird, Director of Secondary Performing Arts for Aldine ISD and a member of the CEDFA Training Cadre, assisted the Music/Social Studies sessions as a presenter coach.

Highlights of the Fine Arts Summit included an impressive and entertaining Opening Session

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performance by the “Gallery in Motion” dance ensemble from Newman Smith High School in the Carrollton-Farmers Branch Independent School District. The keynote speaker for the Closing Session of the Summit was Douglas Herbert, Special Assistant on Teacher Quality and Arts Education for the U.S. Department of Education. Mr. Herbert’s very informative presentation was entitled “Destination: The Arts as a Core Academic Subject” and was enthusiastically received by the 400+ Summit participants. Other features of the Summit were as follows:

- an enlightening administrators strand of workshops pertaining to districtwide implementation of arts integration curriculum presented by an exemplary panel of fine arts administrators: Charles Aguilon, Director of Fine Arts for the Georgetown Independent School District, Peter Warshaw, Director of Fine Arts for the Leander Independent School District, and Jim Van Zandt (presenter coach), Director of Fine Arts for the Round Rock Independent School District;
- a return of a very popular workshop entitled, “The Accomplished Presenter,” presented by Ed Vara, Staff Development Coordinator for the Region 20 Education Service Center;
- a meeting of the executive officers of each of the state’s major professional arts education associations for the purpose of providing a forum for these leaders to discuss common issues among each of the fine arts subject areas; and
- a “Technology Expo” by arts education-related vendors combined with an enjoyable reception for all Summit attendees.

As fine arts educators, we believe, first and foremost, that the arts should be studied for what they are and are to be valued in and of themselves.

However, in this era of emphasis on student assessment (i.e., TAKS) and state accountability, it is vital that the arts are also viewed as a valuable - if not essential - tool for student achievement and success in other academic disciplines and on standardized tests. We believe, and the latest research supports, that the arts can relevantly and meaningfully connect segments of the curriculum that are fundamentally and customarily compartmentalized. To ensure that the arts are integrated into the curriculum in an effective and appropriate manner, though, the academic integrity of all disciplines must be preserved and maintained. CEDFA’s mission and the primary purpose of the Fine Arts Summit initiative are to serve as a vehicle for providing professional development for educators of all academic disciplines to teach through the arts.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

House Bill 1, the education reform legislation signed into law by Governor Rick Perry during the 3rd called special session of the 79th Legislature, overhauled public school funding, restructured property taxes, and provided for education reform. Two educational reform measures that will directly or indirectly affect music/ fine arts education are as follows:

School Start Date

Beginning with the 2007-2008 school year, school districts are prohibited from beginning instruction for a school year before the fourth Monday in August. The prohibition may not be waived, but an exception for operation of a year-round system under Section 25.084 of the Texas Education Code is provided. Because of this legislation, Texas band directors will need to adjust their 2007 summer band schedules accordingly as a result of the new school start date.

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“4 By 4” Graduation Plan

House Bill 1 mandates that students following either the Recommended or Distinguished Achievement Graduation Program (24 total credits each) must earn four credits in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies (also known as the “4 By 4 Graduation Plan”). Currently, 4 credits of English language arts and 4 credits of social studies are already required under the Recommended and Distinguished Achievement Programs. In an effort to meet the “4 By 4” requirements that add a fourth year of mathematics and science to high school graduation requirements and to avoid adversely affecting elective courses, the SBOE will consider at their next meeting, Wednesday-Friday, September 13-15, increasing the number of credits required for graduation from 24 to 26. The graduation plan proposals under consideration only apply to the Recommended and Distinguished Achievement Programs. The changes are expected to apply to students who are entering grade nine in 2007 and thereafter. The Minimum Graduation Program, which requires 22 credits, would not be affected by any of the proposals. If the fourth credits of mathematics and science were added and the total number of required credits remained at 24, the number of elective credits would decrease from 3.5 to 1.5 for the Recommended Program and from 2.5 to 0.5 for the Distinguished Achievement Program under this scenario, which conceivably could affect students’ ability to participate in high school band or other fine arts content areas for four years.

I hope that all of you had an enjoyable and restful summer vacation, and, as we begin another school year, I am pleased to share part of a message from Dr. Shirley Neeley, TEA Commissioner of Education, that was printed in the Texas Fine Arts Summit VII program as a welcome to Summit participants:

The arts are essential for the healthy development of children and are an integral component of our educational system in developing the attitudes, characteristics, and intellectual capacities required for students to participate successfully in today’s society and economy. The arts teach self-discipline, reinforce self-esteem, foster thinking skills and creativity, and promote teamwork and cooperation, all of which are so valued in the workplace. Most notably, though, the arts are important in and of themselves in that they are a vital and vibrant part of our personal, social, and cultural environment.

Thank you for all that you do for your students each and every day in the band rehearsal halls of Texas schools. You have my best wishes for a successful and rewarding 2006-07 school year. Please visit the CEDFA website at <http://www.cedfa.org>, and, as always, do not hesitate to contact me if I can ever be of service or assistance to you.

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The Fine Arts Unit within the Division of Curriculum provides direction and leadership for the state’s public school art, dance, music, and theatre programs, grades K-12. The Fine Arts Unit facilitates various fine arts statewide initiatives, including implementation of the Fine Arts Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and assistance to the TEA Division of Textbook Administration with the adoption process for fine arts instructional materials. The Fine Arts Unit also oversees the operations of the Center for Educator Development in Fine Arts (CEDFA), which is a statewide project to support fine arts education in Texas schools.