



Setting a Better Table:

## How Can CMEA More Effectively Serve the Needs of General Music Teachers?

by Richard Lawton  
CMEA General Music Representative

I am delighted to report that attendance at the general music sessions for CASMEC 2015 was up significantly. Sessions were standing room only, and the addition of the world music workshops, overseen by CMEA World Music Representative Dr. Lily Chen-Hafteck, added a great deal of energy and excitement. Since one of the goals for the year was to persuade more general music teachers that CMEA membership makes sense for them, there was a feeling that, at least as far as the conference goes, we are on the right track.

During the conference we conducted a survey of the general music workshop attendees with the goal of better understanding what kind of teachers were coming and why. Not everybody who participated in the survey was a teacher, of course – we had students and spouses and a few administrators – but among those who were, 83 percent indicated they worked in public schools, with two-third reporting that they taught in grades K–6. They had a variety of instructional orientations, with 43 percent having an Orff background and 35 percent saying that they had Kodály orientation. A smaller number, 20 percent, said they had studied Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Many had training in all three.

Sixty-three percent indicated that their school or some other entity had paid at least part of the expenses associated with attending the conference, whereas 36 percent had paid their own way. This is particularly impressive when you consider the distance many traveled. Contrary to what might have been expected, the majority of attendees had come more than 50 miles, including a little over a one-third that had traveled 200 miles or more.

As for why they came, that was not a surprise

– 90 percent reported their primary purpose in coming to CASMEC was professional development. The survey included a list of six possible topics for future general music workshops. Movement and world music were the topics that ranked highest, but most people checked all six boxes, and several wrote additional suggestions in the margins.

A profile of the CMEA-belonging, CASMEC-attending general music teacher emerged. He or she is most likely a public elementary school teacher with a range of skills and training, and a determination to learn more... about everything. CMEA generalists are not afraid to travel some distance for professional development, and, while support from their district is not a prerequisite, it makes a difference. I could not help but notice that there were very few, if any, music teachers at CASMEC from my own school's district, Los Angeles Unified. LAUSD has not supported efforts of its arts teachers to attend state conferences in the recent past (although there is a happy rumor that, under new LAUSD Arts Branch leadership, this may change for CASMEC 2016).

The survey provided clues as to how to further refine what the conference has to offer general music teachers every February, but what about the rest of the year? Are there other activities and programs CMEA should be engaged in to make membership more attractive to generalists? To find out, I looked into how other large states with a reputation for excellence in general music run things. Two states, Florida and Texas, quickly emerged as having the most robust general/elementary music tracks in the country. Those programs are different from California's. In developing an even rudi-

mentary understanding of the differences and similarities, I had the kind assistance of Marie Radloff, the Florida Elementary Music Educators Association president-elect and Juli Salzman, the Texas Music Educators Association Elementary vice president and division chair. I thank them for their time and their patience.

Some may argue that measuring state music programs against each other is an apples and oranges proposition, but there are several reasons why a comparison among Florida, Texas, and California is apt. All three are large, diverse states with urban and rural population areas. All three have an enormous number of children in public schools and massive public education budgets. It is true that California is emerging from a serious state budget crisis, but Florida and Texas are experiencing similar problems, and the state music associations there must also contend with state houses not known for their support of teacher unions, public education, or the arts. Despite this, they are thriving.

In Florida, elementary/general music is administered through the Florida Elementary Music Educators Association (FEMEA), a component organization of the Florida Music Educators Association (FMEA). FEMEA has its own executive board, constitution, and bylaws; its president sits on the Executive Board of FMEA. As in California, teachers join NAFME and FMEA at the same time, but for an additional \$25 they can also become members of FEMEA.

The fact that the extra dues are not viewed as a burden may have something to do with the many programs FMEA and FEMEA offer to elementary music specialists. In addition to overseeing general music for the state music conference, FEMEA has its own conference in June and at least two regional conferences for FEMEA members. FEMEA oversees several other programs, including an All-State Choir program for 4th and 5th graders and, new this year, an All-State Orff Ensemble.

As for the annual FMEA conference in Tampa, it attracts more than 8,000 music educators. Last year, 644 attendees were FEMEA members, and 55 out of 250 workshops had a primary focus on elementary music. By contrast, 568 CMEA members attended CASMEC in 2015, and there were seven General Music and World Music sessions. Florida's confer-

ence also attracts many more general music vendors, who underwrite, as Peri-pole does at CASMEC, the cost of bringing in nationally recognized clinicians.

Texas has an even larger annual conference, with more than 300 sessions and 9,200 music educator attendees. It is held in conjunction with the Technology in Music Pre-Conference, making it, by far, the largest state music conference in the country.

TMEA is not affiliated with NAFME. As a result, its dues are lower: currently \$50 per year. Affordability is a contributing factor to widespread participation by Texas music teachers, and that, in turn, has resulted in TMEA being well-funded. It is so well-funded that in some years, in order to maintain its nonprofit status, TMEA has returned money to its members in the form of grants to individual teachers and programs.

TMEA is divided into five divisions: band, orchestra, vocal, elementary, and college. General music/elementary music, the second largest division, is overseen by the TMEA Elementary vice president and division chair. All the divisions have a vice president who serves on the TMEA executive board and from among whom the TMEA president is chosen. An elementary VP has served as TMEA president on more than one occasion.

TMEA does not organize and oversee all-state elementary ensembles, as FMEA does. Instead, those opportunities are available through other groups such as the Texas Choir Directors Association. However, TMEA does fund a program in which each of the five divisions in every region (there are 28) is eligible for a \$800 grant to hold a local workshop throughout the year, potentially a \$112,000 annual commitment, with \$22,400 specifically allocated to general/elementary music.

Clearly, FMEA and TMEA have more developed general music programs than CMEA does, but it is worth noting that, when compared to states besides Florida and Texas, California's general music/elementary music focus is about average. Bigger is not necessarily better. And even if CMEA were to decide to adopt a general music approach similar to Texas or Florida, we lack the manpower to implement it or the space to house it.

Nevertheless, it is useful to have an awareness of what works in these other

states in broad strokes because the result is a much higher level of participation among elementary school music teachers. Some of those broad strokes include:

- Regional festivals and all-state ensemble opportunities
- Top shelf professional development clinicians at conferences sponsored by multiple vendors
- Occasional grants to members
- A strong independent identity for general music/elementary music specialists
- Executive board status for general music
- Reaching out to districts and administrators to enlist their support – as we learned from our survey, elementary music teachers join CMEA and come to CASMEC on their own dime, but district support would make it easier for them and many others who do not currently participate. Florida and Texas, like California, are pursuing lobbying efforts with their state representatives in order to build a solid legislative foundation for music education. At the same time, both Florida and Texas are engaged in ongoing efforts to convince district supervisors and even individual principals that state music organization membership and state music conference attendance is a good thing for their students and their teachers.

This idea of communicating the value of general music education is particularly important. When I began looking into what the successful general music practices were in individual states and nationally, I found good information outside of Florida and Texas very hard to come by. I concluded this was because such practices are rare. My investigation was hardly comprehensive, so it is too soon to say whether this is an accurate statement, but I think it is an understandable perception. And when we are asking teachers to pony up annual dues, and many of them are already paying to belong to their local Orff and Kodály chapters, perception counts.

That's why we who are members of CMEA ought to follow the lead of Florida and Texas in the one way that won't cost us anything. We need to reach out to general music teachers whenever the opportunity presents itself and say, with meaning, "what you do is vitally important to children... and to us." And when it's that time of year again, we need to add, "please come to dinner."

