

Selecting a Master Teacher

- Experience is Everything. Look for a Master Teacher who is truly a master of the public school music classroom. Undergraduate and graduate student teachers are likely to be relatively accomplished musicians who lack classroom management skills and the ability to keep children engaged during classes. Your Master Teacher should be an experienced local public school string teacher who knows how to teach strings in heterogeneous groups.

String Project Master Teachers often possess more than fifteen years of teaching experience and often conduct youth orchestras or manage other youth music programs within their community and state (though this is not a specific requirement). Some Project Directors look for Master Teachers who are currently teaching in public schools, believing that they are current on modern-day attitudes and experiences of grade-school children, as well as the legalities and other considerations of teaching in the twenty-first century classroom.

- Find a Role Model. Most all agree that the best training for student teachers is just doing it – working in a live classroom and gaining the hands-on experience of teaching children. Find a Master Teacher who is skilled at teaching by example. It is recommended that Master Teachers teach one class (twice weekly) as a model, then observe and supervise the student teachers as they teach. Your Master Teacher must set an example while also allowing student teachers the chance to experiment and learn from their mistakes.
- A Partner in Curriculum Development. Master Teachers often work independently or in collaboration with Project Directors to develop their String Project curriculum, lesson plans, and age-appropriate materials. Master Teachers should possess demonstrated experience in developing music education curriculum for grade-school children.
- One Size Doesn't Fit All. Master Teachers must use a variety of teaching techniques to coach student teachers and help them develop into confident and effective classroom teachers. Some techniques work better than others depending upon the student teachers. Master Teachers should feel comfortable using group teaching methods, case studies, one-on-one coaching, videotaping, and other means to help students advance their skills.
- Commitment to the Cause. Effective Master Teachers typically spend a minimum of four hours per week in classes on campus and additional time preparing lessons and coaching student teachers. Many campuses also require significant commuting time, some as long as ninety minutes each way. Be realistic with potential Master Teachers about the required time commitment on and off campus. To be successful your Master Teacher must be clear about the position before they can honestly commit to completing a full year (or more) of classes.

- Passion! Passion! Passion! Look for teachers who clearly demonstrate a true passion for teaching. First-year String Project evaluations indicate that Master Teachers personally benefit from their participation with the String Project in three primary ways. First, Master Teachers say they benefit by seeing undergraduate students transition from uncomfortable, awkward, and timid teachers into confident and effective teachers. Second, the satisfaction of seeing grade-school children learn to read and play music, develop new skills, and become excited about exploring the world of music and stringed instruments. Third, the opportunity to apply and expand their own skills (often a lifetime of teaching experience) to create effective curriculum and new approaches for teaching the teacher as well as the students.
- Be Flexible and Do Your Best. Change happens, sometimes at midstream during your program year. Some sites, for a variety of reasons, experience difficulty identifying and retaining Master Teachers. Due to a lack of interested and qualified candidates within their own community, some sites charge graduate students with the responsibilities of Master Teachers, accompanied by hands-on involvement and supervision from the Project Director. Each String Project is unique, and finding the right fit for your circumstances may result in an approach that lands slightly outside the parameters set by ASTA WITH NSOA's recommendations and requirements. Always consult with ASTA WITH NSOA staff and volunteers to gain new ideas and to ensure adherence to program requirements.