

## **OMEA Conference Registration Policy for Teachers of Participating Students**

During the past five years, the OMEA Board has voted to adopt several policies regarding the registration of teachers of participating students in all-state ensembles. In 2004, the inability to successfully enforce these policies led to a Board decision regarding follow-up. In short, the students of teachers who failed to pay the registration fee would be restricted from participation in all-state events until the teacher paid the fee. This policy led to notification letters being sent last spring to teachers. As a result, there has been a certain amount of discussion and controversy regarding the appropriateness of these policies.

The policies in question are as follows:

OMEA Board Policy: All-State Honor Groups – Teachers

1) Middle School Directors must be registered and present at all conferences where they have a Middle School Honor Group participant(s). **9/23/2000**

2) High school directors sending students to the All-State Honor Groups are required to register for the conference. A music teacher from the participating school or and OMEA approved representative must also be in attendance at the conference. **1/12/2002**

3) Teachers of all students of all ages in OMEA Honor Groups shall be required to register for the full conference, pay in full, and be current MENC members. If such is not the case, that school's specific discipline (i.e., Band, orchestra, choir) will be sanctioned from participating in honor groups until the bill is paid in full. **5/22/2004**

**Arguments against the policy.** Arguments against the policy have mostly focused on the two following points:

1. The unfairness of students being punished as a result of the actions of their teacher. The basic point is, why should students have to suffer? If we are concerned about students, then they should come first. We should never restrict student learning because of the teacher's mistakes.

2. The unfairness of requiring teachers to register so that their students can participate. Students already pay to participate, so why does the teacher also have to pay? Since teachers already are required to be a member of OMEA/MENC, is this not a required second membership?

**OMEA exists for Oregon's music teachers.** The purpose of OMEA is to serve the music teachers of Oregon. One of the ways we do that is to provide music opportunities for students of OMEA members. It is important to remember that while we are devoted to the music education of students, our service is not actually to students, but to music teachers. The organization of events such as the all-state ensembles is very important because we provide an educational opportunity that teachers are not able to do on their own.

Teachers benefit from the all-state ensembles in a number of ways. First of all, they benefit because they are able to provide their students with a transformational music experience that they cannot do in their own program. Their students interact with other music students around the state and develop new relationships. Their students bring attitudes and advocacy back to the rehearsal. While all of this certainly benefits the students, the main reason we do this is to support OMEA members in their professional work.

**Someone should pay!** The second misconception is one of finances. We are all guilty in our life of having the belief system, “someone should pay.” When we say that, we mean, someone else should pay. Of course, students pay to participate in the ensemble, and their fee is vital in paying the expenses of the all-state ensemble.

The key question is, who pays for the existence of OMEA? Who should pay? Of course, someone should pay. I wish it were someone else, but for better or worse, we are the someone else. A strong and active OMEA ensures that the projects of OMEA continue, including all-state ensembles. So who should pay? Well, the folks who should pay are the ones who benefit the most. Do you benefit when your students spend three days with other like-minded musicians studying at the altar of music with one of your profession’s best conductors? Yes, you do. You benefit because your students benefit. Do you benefit enough to support the organization with your participation? That is a question all teachers must answer.

**Should students suffer because of the failure of their teacher to register?** Well, ideally the students should not have to suffer because of their teacher. But remember that OMEA is not a music association for music students. It is a music association for music teachers. Membership has its benefits, and the willingness to support OMEA allows teachers to provide opportunity to their students for life-altering musical experiences. This is not an OSAA event where the state is supporting an activity for the benefit of Oregon students. This is an event organized and sponsored by the OMEA, a professional non-tax supported association to support music teachers.

**Don’t the students already pay?** Well yes and no. They do pay for the expenses related specifically to the all-state ensemble. But their fees do not pay for the organization that makes that musical event possible. The all-state ensembles are the fruit of our organization, and it is a very powerful fruit indeed. But it is not the tree. The tree is the many volunteers, the executive director, the webpage, and the structure of the organization, all of which costs money to continue. While MENC dues pay for a portion of this, the organization could not survive without finances raised from an annual conference. Our organization would cease to exist, as would its activities, such as all-state ensembles.

**In these days of budget cuts, paying for another conference and missing more school can be difficult.** Yes, this is a very important point, and we must continue to remember this in our discussions of how we plan our events. When one not only one has to pay MENC dues, but also the conference registration, room and board while in Eugene, and perhaps, even pay for your own substitute teacher, it becomes very difficult for teachers to participate. In a fair world, school districts would support vital professional development such as an OMEA conference. In an ideal world, they would require their teachers to attend and pay for all the expenses. We understand that these board decisions can hit you right in the wallet, and board members attending the conference understand this because they pay the same conference fees and other related expenses (only board members whose duties preclude them from attendance are relieved of the conference fee).

The purpose of this article was to explain the OMEA Board’s recent actions regarding the enforcement of these policies. Please remember that the board is simply a collection of music teachers who volunteer their time and effort beyond their normal teaching responsibilities. Those with comments and ideas regarding this article and the above discussed policies are encouraged to communicate your thoughts.