



Virginia Guitar Directors Association Kevin Vigil, DMA, Chair

Guitar for the Non-Guitarist Music Educator

This article is based on a lecture that I was asked to present to the NAFME Chapter of Shenandoah University in early November 2021. The topic request was specifically from the instrumental division of this chapter's mini-conference. I was told that this was the first time that a guitarist was asked to speak on this topic. Thank you to Dr. Jeffrey Marlatt, Amy Hernandez, and Juan Andujar for the invitation and for facilitating this presentation.

Question to students: What does this mean?



Student Answers:

- You are certified to teach in Virginia.
- You get paid more because you have a postgraduate professional license.
- You are endorsed to teach Instrumental and Vocal/Choral Music PreK – 12.

Question to Students: How do you see your future as a music educator?

Student Answers:

- Elementary
- Middle School or High School
- Band Director
- Choir Director
- Orchestra Director

Question to Students: How will you get hired?

Student Responses:

- Apply for openings
- Network and apply for openings
- Interview

Hiring practices vary from district to district and they seem to change over time. Personally, I was hired by the Music Supervisor (a position that no longer exists in LCPS). At that time, the music supervisor could hire and place teachers where they believed was best. Currently, principals do the hiring in LCPS. Some principals seek advice from the LCPS Fine Arts Supervisor, Music Specialist, and Department Chair while others bypass their guidance. Some people are hired as long-term substitutes and take over the position when it opens.

The Virginia teaching license offers two endorsements: Vocal/Choral and Instrumental. While my license reflects endorsements for both, I have no idea why I have the Vocal/Choral endorsement. It must be from a review of my college transcripts; I took Oratorio Chorus as a large ensemble credit in college. This, in my opinion, does not make me qualified to teach choir. If I was asked to teach choir, I would request to be reassigned or teach part-time.

You may well be assigned to teach something outside your comfort zone. Here are a few possibilities:

- Jazz Band
- Class Piano
- Music Theory
- Music Appreciation
- Modern Band
- Mariachi
- World Music
- Music Technology
- Special Education/Music Therapy
- Guitar

Some of the subjects listed above were certainly covered in your college curriculum, but you may have little to no experience with others. If you were hired to teach one of these, would you feel qualified? So, what do the license endorsements really mean? Not much. In fact, anybody can teach any subject under a provisional (temporary) license. So what will you be assigned to teach?

Here is the abstract from an article titled, "The State of Guitar Education in the United States" by Robert Pethel, published in the *Journal of Popular Music Education*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2019).

Guitar education has emerged as a discipline in K-12 institutions alongside 'traditional' music education such as band, orchestra and chorus in recent decades. Despite the substantial body of literature containing practical advice on teaching guitar, research-supported scholarship is lacking. The purpose of this study was to provide an evidentiary-based understanding of the professional profiles of guitar educators. students.

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A large sample (n = 1269) of guitar educators participated in the Guitar Educator Questionnaire (GEQ). Findings from the GEQ suggest a low percent (7.9%) of music educators who teach guitar class consider themselves to be 'guitar specialists'. A substantial number of respondents (68.5%) indicated that they rarely or never participated in guitar-related professional development, and 76.1% of respondents reported that their pre-service training provided little or no preparation for a career in guitar education.

Now let's look at another metric. Thomas Amoriello (former chair of the NAFME Council for Guitar Education) authored a series of interviews for the NAFME Music in a Minute blog titled "Guitar Class in 50 States". For a list of these interviews, click on this link: <https://nafme.org/guitar-class-in-50-states-coda/> The educators who were interviewed are considered to be dedicated specialists in this field.

Bill Swick (another former chair of the NAFME Council for Guitar Education) followed up on Amoriello's series with his article, "[Observations of Guitar Class in 50 States](#)". From Swick's observations, only 32% of the 50 educators interviewed for Amoriello's series majored in guitar or guitar was their main instrument in college.

Both Pethel's findings and Swick's observations highlight the fact that most guitar educators are not themselves guitarists or consider themselves as such. The point is that you may end up teaching guitar.

Band directors certainly teach many instruments including woodwinds, brass and, percussion. There are, of course, method classes for these varied instrumental categories as part of standard music education programs. This is not necessarily

the case for guitar, as the research suggests.

What makes teaching guitar different from other instruments? The short answer is technique. You may be a fine musician, but are you able to model guitar technique(s)? Technique is a simple answer, but it also encompasses the ability to play monophonic, homophonic, and polyphonic music. Like the bowed stringed instruments, there are different techniques for each hand. Right hand technique requires the ability to play the various textures with picks and fingers. The left hand must stop (press) as many as six strings simultaneously.

Note locations (mapping) can be quite challenging for the non-guitarist. While there is a logic to the fingerboard, it is not as clear cut as the piano or a woodwind instrument. In fact, the same exact note (unisons) can be played in as many as five locations, not including harmonics.

The guitar is capable of a large color palette. There is a reason that Beethoven once stated, "The guitar is a miniature orchestra in itself." Effects such as left and right hand harmonics, frappe, rasqueado, pizzicato, tamboura, golpe, slide, snare, and prepared guitars are often overlooked by many music educators; not to mention tone production. See [VMEA Notes, Spring 2021](#), p. 18.

Expectations are also important to consider. Being a guitarist often has others assuming that you can teach all styles from "hum and strum", folk, country, pop, rock, metal, jazz, classical, and more. Other expectations include participation in All-County, All-Regional and All-State events. To meet these expect-

tations, students need a strong foundation.

Is it possible for you to be a strong guitar educator? Yes. In fact, Chris Perez, the current chair of the NAFME Council for Guitar Education is a percussionist. So, what can you do to prepare for teaching guitar? You could attend the [Teach Guitar Workshops](#) or the [Austin Classical Guitar Teacher Training](#). You could sign up to have a [VMEA Guitar Mentor](#). Perhaps the best option would be to have private lessons with a someone with a degree in guitar performance.

You may also want to take advantage of the many free resources listed here:

- [NAfME Guitar Best Practices](#)
- [NAfME Best Practices Videos](#) (coming soon)
- [Guitar Curriculum](#)
- [GFATv](#)
- [Classroom Guitar](#)
- [Virginia Department of Education](#)
- [Facebook School Guitar Teachers Group](#)

Final Thought

Guitar is often the class that will make your position full-time. Please remember that these are not just numbers; they are kids who are eager to learn what you have to offer. Take advantage of any learning opportunities that you can in order serve your future.

