

## Membership of the Music Educators National Conference from 1912-1938: A Demographic and Economic Analysis

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to examine relationships between the membership of the Music Supervisors National Conference/Music Educators National Conference (MENC) from 1912-1938 and selected demographic and economic variables. The results include the following: (a) MENC membership grew considerably more rapidly than the nation's general and teacher populations; (b) membership and membership as a percentage of the population differed significantly between MENC divisions; (c) membership correlated with mean teacher salaries and with geographical distance to convention sites; (d) membership by state correlated only slightly with membership in each division, but a smaller majority than in the nation's teaching profession as a whole; and (e) implementation of the MENC's biennial convention plan did not affect membership totals significantly. We speculate that MENC membership as a percentage of music educators may have differed between MENC divisions, and that such membership differences may have resulted from regional identification or other cultural factors not examined in this study. We recommend further application of quantitative sociological research techniques and cultural research approaches to the study of past and present practices in music and music education.*

### The Study

The history of the Music Supervisors National Conference/Music Educators National Conference (MENC) has been investigated by several researchers (Houlihan, 1961; Kaufman, 1942/1943; Kidd, 1984; Lehman, 1979/1980; Molnar, 1948; Timmerman, 1960), all of whom used traditional historical research techniques to examine the organization's administrative leaders and structures, finances, publications, conventions, and philosophies (Biffle, 1991). However, just as most of the research literature on music education history does not focus on ordinary music teachers, students, and programs (Humphreys, 1996/1997, 1997a, 1997b, in press), the literature on MENC history is largely silent about the organization's rank-and-file membership.

The period 1912-1938 encompassed much of the period of great change

in American education that resulted from the nation's transformation to an industrial economy, rapidly increasing immigration and urbanization, and other major shifts in the social and economic landscape that occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Not coincidentally, the years 1912-1938 also encompassed the heyday of the Progressive Education Movement, which exerted a profound effect on American education in general and on music education in particular (Humphreys, 1992/1995).

Proponents of progressive education stressed compulsory school attendance laws, and they emphasized high school education. The fact that many more students attended school in the early 20th century than previously likely explains much of the increase in the number of teachers relative to the increase in national population from 1912-1938. The period 1912-1938 also saw large increases in the number and size of public school music programs. In 1912, relatively few schools supported bands and mixed choirs, whereas, by 1938, these ensembles had become the norm in American high schools and in many junior high and elementary schools. General music had existed throughout much of the 19th century, but it too fared well under progressivism as well as other influences (Humphreys, 1992/1995).

Mark and Gary (1992) noted that Midwestern music educators dominated the MENC during the early years of the organization, but they provided little explanation and scant documentation for that assertion other than a membership list for the first meeting, which occurred in 1907. Molnar (1948) made a similar claim, which he supported with annual membership figures by state. To gain a more complete understanding, membership data should be examined across an extended period of time and in the context of other demographic and economic variables. For example, the Midwest may have contributed more MENC members than did the other regions during the early years simply because it had a larger population and a larger number of music teachers.

A visual inspection of MENC convention attendance figures (Birge, 1937/1966) and membership lists suggests that a much larger percentage of members attended the organization's conventions during the years prior to World War II than is the case today. During its early years, the MENC offered few tangible advantages to its members beyond subscription to the *Music Supervisors Journal/Music Educators Journal* and access to conventions. That fact, coupled with low membership fees and the fee structure itself, suggests that many individuals may have joined the MENC mainly to enable them to attend the conventions.<sup>1</sup> If convention access was a major factor, distance to the convention sites might have influenced individuals' decisions about whether to join the organization. Indeed, the large number of conventions held in certain geographical regions during the MENC's early decades might explain the large numbers of members from those regions.

Economic variables may also explain regional membership disparities. Molnar (1948), for example, suggested that the Southern Division supported

fewer music programs and music teachers and thus produced fewer potential MENC members than the other divisions because of the region's relatively weak economy. However, it is also possible that regional differences in teachers' salaries affected individual teachers' ability to pay the membership dues and convention expenses. To date, no one has presented solid evidence that supports or refutes either of these explanations.

It appears that the majority of the MENC's early leaders were men. Indeed, most of the published research on MENC history, and on other aspects of music education history as well, is by and about men (Humphreys, 1996/1997, 1997b; Humphreys, Bess, & Bergee, 1996/1997). Researchers, however, have not examined the gender of the MENC membership throughout the organization's history. Furthermore, researchers have not studied relationships between the gender of the general teaching population and that of the music education profession.

Finally, it appears that the MENC implemented its biennial convention plan (alternating yearly between division and national conventions) in 1927 to accommodate the emerging division (sectional) conferences while preserving a single, unified organization (Mark & Gary, 1992). The effects of that plan, if any, on national membership figures have not been documented.

The purpose of this study was to examine selected demographic and economic variables in relation to membership of the MENC from 1912-1938. We examined MENC membership for each of the years 1912-1938 in relation to: (a) general population, (b) number of teachers, (c) teacher salaries, (d) education spending, (e) MENC division, (f) distance to convention sites, (g) gender of members, and (h) the biennial convention plan.

## Method

The MENC published membership lists in its conference proceedings and yearbooks for 27 consecutive years (1912-1938) (see Appendix A for citations).<sup>2</sup> The lists include each member's name, address, and membership status. We included regular individual members from the 48 states and the District of Columbia in this study. We excluded associate members, individuals for whom no address appears, institutional members, and regular members from United States territories and foreign countries.

Each member's state and geographical region were assigned using the six current MENC division configurations.<sup>3</sup> We determined the gender of each member from the first (given) and middle names on the membership lists. Individuals with initials only for first and middle names were deemed males. In some ambiguous cases, we determined gender of members from information found in various biographical sources. We excluded undeterminable cases from the analysis (1.7% of all cases).

We obtained state population figures from summaries of United States census reports (Bogue, 1985). We estimated state populations for non-decen-

nial census years by interpolating from the two closest census years using a formula designed to compute compound interest. The formula assumes a constant annual percentage increase or decrease throughout a given decade.<sup>4</sup> We performed these calculations on a spread sheet program (Microsoft, 1985-1992).

Annual per capita education spending for each state was calculated by dividing the total state educational expenditure for each year by that state's population (or population estimate). We obtained data on annual educational expenditures, mean teacher salaries, and teacher gender by state from United States Bureau/Office of Education documents (see Appendix B for citations).<sup>5</sup>

For each of the 27 years, distance to the convention site was defined as the number of miles from the largest city in each member's state to the national convention city or the nearest division convention city, depending on the year. We used decennial census data for large cities (Androit, 1980) to interpolate non-census-year estimates for the largest city in each state using the formula mentioned above.<sup>6</sup> Distances between cities were taken from a military road mileage compendium (Departments of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, 1981).

## Results

Significant changes occurred in MENC membership, numbers of teachers nationally, and the national population from 1912-1938. MENC membership rose from 119 in 1912 to 3,255 in 1938, an increase of 2,735%, whereas the number of teachers nationally rose from 546,689 to 877,266, an increase of 60.5%. During the same period, the national population rose from 94,494,000 to 130,104,000, an increase of 37.7%. MENC membership as a percentage of state population was significantly correlated with year (1912-1938) ( $r = .53, p < .001$ ). These data indicate that MENC membership grew considerably more rapidly than the number of teachers nationally and than the national population.

To examine trends in selected variables over time, we divided the 27-year period into three 9-year periods (1912-1920, 1921-1929, 1930-1938). Analysis by division for the three periods suggests consistent geographic differences in MENC membership patterns (see Table 1). Division differences in MENC membership were significant for each period (1912-1920,  $\chi^2 = 96.2, p < .001$ ; 1921-1929,  $\chi^2 = 75.65, p < .001$ ; 1930-1938,  $\chi^2 = 56.1, p < .001$ ). More than 40% of MENC members in the two periods spanning 1912-1929 were from the North Central Division; the Eastern Division had the second largest number of members. In the 1930-1938 period, the Eastern Division contributed a slightly larger number of members (34.7%) than did the North Central Division (33.5%). The Northwest, Southern, and Western divisions each contributed less than 11% of total MENC memberships during each

9-year period. However, as the decreasing  $\chi^2$  values across the three periods indicate, the magnitude of divisional disparities in membership decreased over time.

Table 1  
MENC Membership in Percentage by Division and Period

Division	Period			
	1912-1920	1921-1929	1930-1938	1912-1938
Eastern	31.5	26.6	34.7	31.8
North Central	44.9	43.1	33.5	37.4
Northwest	1.4	2.3	4.5	3.6
Southern	5.5	9.8	6.7	7.6
Southwestern	15.3	16.1	10.1	12.4
Western	1.5	2.1	10.5	7.2

We sought further clarification of membership differences between divisions by examining MENC membership as a percentage of state population (see Table 2). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) results show significant division differences in MENC membership as a percentage of state population for each of the nine-year periods: (a) 1912-1920 ( $F_{5,435} = 8.468, p < .001, r^2 = .08$ ); (b) 1921-1929 ( $F_{5,435} = 15.32, p < .001, r^2 = .15$ ); (c) 1930-1938 ( $F_{5,435} = 31.56, p < .001, r^2 = .27$ ). In contrast to the trend toward less regional disparity in MENC membership noted above, the increasing  $r^2$  values for the effect of division on MENC membership as a percentage of state population increased over time. Post hoc (Scheffé) tests indicate that: (a) for 1912-1920, the North Central Division contributed significantly more MENC members as a percentage of its population than each of the other five divisions ( $p < .05$ ); all other comparisons within this time period are non-significant ( $p > .05$ ); (b) for 1921-1928, the North Central Division contributed a significantly higher percentage of its population than did the Western, Eastern, and Southern divisions, and the Southern Division contributed a significantly lower percentage than the Eastern, Northwest, Eastern, and Southwestern divisions ( $p < .05$ ); (c) for 1930-1938, the Southern Division contributed a significantly lower percentage of its population than all other divisions, and the Southwestern Division contributed a significantly lower percentage than all divisions except the Southern Division ( $p < .05$ ).

The mean of the states' teacher salaries nationally rose from \$484 in 1912 to \$1,299 in 1938, an increase of 168.4%. Mean per capita spending for

Table 2  
MENC Membership as a Percentage of State Population by Division and Period

Division	Period		
	1912-1920	1921-1929	1930-1938
Eastern	.004	.023	.042
North Central	.008	.032	.044
Northwest	.003	.021	.055
Southern	.001	.001	.012
Southwestern	.005	.024	.029
Western	.002	.012	.049

education rose from \$5.33 to \$16.13, an increase of 202.6%. Hence, per capita spending for education increased faster than did teachers' salaries. However, the partial correlation between per capita education spending and teacher salaries by state (controlling for year) is moderately high (partial  $r = .72, p < .05$ ).

There were significant differences in mean teacher salaries among divisions during each of the three periods (1912-1920  $F_{5,435} = 55.73, p < .001, r^2 = .39$ ; 1921-1929  $F_{5,435} = 73.41, p < .001, r^2 = .46$ ; 1930-1938  $F_{5,434} = 90.71, p < .001, r^2 = .51$ ). Scheffé tests indicate that mean teacher salaries were significantly lower in the Southern Division and significantly higher in the Eastern and Western divisions than in the other divisions ( $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, the increasing  $r^2$  values indicate that the salary differences among divisions became more pronounced over time. Across the 27-year period, the partial correlation (controlling for year) is low between MENC membership and mean salary by state (partial  $r = .36, p < .001$ ). When MENC membership is defined as the percentage of teachers within a state, the partial correlation (controlling for year) between that variable and mean salary remains low (partial  $r = .33, p < .001$ ).

There were similar differences in per capita education spending by division for each of the three time periods (1912-1920  $F_{5,435} = 92.72, p < .0001, r^2 = .52$ ; 1921-1929  $F_{5,435} = 111.28, p < .0001, r^2 = .56$ ; 1930-1938  $F_{5,434} = 103.25, p < .0001, r^2 = .54$ ). Scheffé tests indicate that mean per capita education spending was significantly lower in the Southern Division than in each of the other divisions during all three periods ( $p < .001$ ). Across the 27-year period, the partial correlation (controlling for year) is low between MENC membership and per capita education spending (partial  $r = .23, p < .001$ ). However, when membership is defined as a percentage of state population, the partial correlation (controlling for year) between that variable and per capita education spending is somewhat higher (partial  $r = .55, p < .001$ ).

We examined relationships between the geographical distance to convention sites and MENC membership through partial correlations (controlling for state population). Proximity to the convention sites explains statistically significant yet small amounts of variance in membership for 1912-1920 (partial  $r = -.20, p < .001$ ) and 1921-1929 (partial  $r = -.31, p < .001$ ), and a non-significant amount of variance for 1930-1938 (partial  $r = .07, p > .001$ ). There was a low negative, non-significant relationship for the entire 27-year period (partial  $r = -.14, p > .001$ ).

In an attempt to learn more about the characteristics of individual members, we broke down the MENC membership data by gender, division, and time period (see Table 3). The percentage of female members nationally increased and then decreased over time, but the female-male percentage ratio remained significantly different in favor of females in all three periods: (a) 1912-1920,  $73.27$  ( $\chi^2 = 21.16, p < .001$ ); (b) 1921-1929,  $76.24$  ( $\chi^2 = 27.04, p < .001$ ); (c) 1930-1938,  $68.32$  ( $\chi^2 = 12.96, p < .001$ ). Moreover, the female-male percentage ratio was significantly higher in favor of females for each

Table 3  
MENC Membership in Percentage by Gender, Division, and Period

Division	Period					
	1912-1920		1921-1929		1930-1938	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Eastern	68	32	73	27	70	30
North Central	75	25	76	24	65	35
Northwest	90	10	81	19	66	34
Southern	80	20	79	21	66	34
Southwestern	77	23	81	19	69	31
Western	69	31	74	26	68	32
Total	73	27	76	24	68	32

division during each of the three periods. (Chi-square values range from 9.00 to 64.00, all significant at  $p < .01$ .)

Finally, we compared national MENC membership totals for the six division convention years included in this study (1927, 1929, 1931, 1933, 1935, 1937) with six adjacent national convention years (1928, 1930, 1932, 1934, 1936, 1938). The difference in mean membership by state between the division ( $M = 83.02, SD = 125.15$ ) and national ( $M = 91.08, SD = 162.85$ ) convention years was not significant ( $t(df=293) = -1.21, p > .05$ ).

### Conclusions

The huge increase in MENC membership from 1912-1938 undoubtedly overstates the numerical increase in music teachers and in public school music programs during the period under study because the MENC was a fledgling organization in 1912 and its growth during the 27-year period likely outpaced that of the profession as a whole. Nevertheless, the MENC membership data may provide some indication of the rapid rise of public school music during that era despite the failure of the Bureau/Office of Education to collect data routinely on music teachers as a separate category.

Regardless, per capita MENC membership was not uniform across the country. There are at least two possible reasons for the regional disparities in membership revealed in this study: (a) there were different numbers of music teachers per capita among divisions; or (b) there were similar numbers of music teachers per capita but different percentages of them chose to join the MENC.

The partial correlation between MENC membership and per capita education spending by state appears to support Molnar's (1948) implied economic explanation for the divisional membership disparities; that is, different regions supported different numbers of music teachers (per capita). There is no evidence, however, that the Southern Division, for example, supported fewer music teachers per capita than the other divisions, aside from indirect evidence in the form of MENC membership figures. On the contrary, the number of teachers and population by state were highly correlated during the period under examination ( $r = .98$ ), which indicates that there were similar numbers of teachers per capita across MENC divisions. Therefore, a plausible explanation for the regional membership disparities is that there were similar numbers of music teachers per capita across divisions, but that the percentage of music teachers who chose to join the MENC differed among divisions.

Differences in teachers' salaries can probably be eliminated as a reason for the regional membership differences because of the low (partial) correlation between the two variables and because MENC dues were extremely low. Similarly, distance to convention sites seems to have had only a small effect on membership, at least as that variable was defined and measured in this study. However, music teachers' psychological identification with a region, as opposed to geographical distance, may help explain membership differences among divisions in relation to the location of convention sites. For example, in 1922, the only year under study in which the national convention was held in the Southern Division (Nashville), that division contributed 17% of all MENC members. In the 2 years immediately prior to and subsequent to 1922, the Southern Division contributed far lower percentages of members to the national totals (1920, 8%; 1921, 7%; 1923, 9%; 1924, 11%). Hence, only in the year in which a national convention was held in the Southern Division did that division come close to contributing its national population share of 21% to the MENC membership roster.