The first annual **Prelude Conference** took place on Saturday, October 26, 2013 at St. Johns Ravenscourt School and although it was a small group and on a very busy weekend, it was a success. The intent was to bring experienced and new band directors together, and to present professional development sessions relevant to the beginner band director. Sessions included a panel discussion involving band directors in their first five years, small-group discussion focused on questions from participants, and presentations by Bill Kristjanson, Taylor Schmidt, Wally Itson, and Doug Breckman.

Some of the participant’s comments included:

“I really enjoyed the small intimate setting with small numbers of attendees.”

“Thank you so much! It was exactly what I needed.”

“Excellent conference for young teachers”

“It was great to have some time for informal discussion with other teachers too.”

A **Mentor Visitation** component was developed to guide and support new teachers and keep them in the profession as long as possible, by providing a mentor to visit at their school for a full or half day. Based on a similar program in Iowa, the MBA covered the cost of two full-day (or alternatively four half-day) visits per first-year teacher. Second year teachers were invited to participate pending the availability of funds. The application process was not time-consuming as mentees simply had to indicate their interest and availability, and let their administrators know they were participating.

Six mentors provided a total of 21 visits to 8 mentees. The mentor/mentee relationship was professional and confidential and not designed to be an evaluation of any kind. The mentors had the mentees' best interests in mind, and went in to listen, observe, coach, conference, offer constructive and non-judgmental feedback, counsel, and model.

Feedback from **mentees** included these comments:

“My experience with the mentor program was practical, informative and highly worthwhile. I would recommend it to any beginning teacher”

“Each time I learned something valuable, and I think my students benefited as well. I really like the "informal" organization of this program. There was no pressure, and it was clear that both my mentor and the MBA had my best interests in mind. “

“The mentorship program was great! The time was definitely worthwhile! I would definitely recommend this program to others.”

“I found the mentorship program to be very worthwhile and I'm glad I took part in the sessions. Both mentors were awesome and I really appreciated their advice! I would definitely recommend this program to other new teachers.”

“The time spent was ABSOLUTELY worthwhile!! “

“This mentorship program was probably one of the most helpful things for me this whole year. I would highly recommend this program to any new teachers! “

“I would strongly recommend the mentorship program to any new teacher. Your mentor can offer you so much insight, so many tips, valuable feedback and support through the toughest year you'll have as an educator”

Feedback from **mentors** included these comments:

“It was a great experience. I think the key is not to go in with a prescription but allow the teachers to talk and identify where they feel their needs are and then take it from there.”
“I would strongly encourage new teachers to take advantage of this program and to not feel they are being evaluated.”

“I think the Mentorship Program is a great idea. I have always taken my cue from the mentee's themselves as to what actions I need to put in place. The best thing about program is the discussions that take place after the observation.”

“The mentor program has great merit in many ways for the new band director. “

Among the recommendations was to advance the deadlines so the conference and visits could begin earlier in the year. This year’s first visitation application deadline will be October 15 and visits will be scheduled as early as October rather than January.

Several common themes emerged from last year’s visits including classroom management, repertoire selection, and dealing with difficult students. Some of these topics will be addressed at this fall’s Prelude conference.

Last year the MBA offered free Da Capo registration for first and second year teachers. Five teachers took advantage of the offer. Upon review it was felt that while a nice gesture, it did not really influence anyone to attend the conference. While we will definitely continue to promote this awesome conference for young teachers, it was decided to redirect this money to the visitation program in 2014/15.

Future plans include:
- more sessions geared especially for beginner band teachers at Tempo 2015.
- expanding the visitation program and collaborating with school divisions.
- facilitating more informal gatherings throughout the year for beginner band teachers.

The 2014 Prelude conference will take place on Saturday October 4 at Maples Collegiate. The earlier date will allow us to start the mentor visitations earlier and avoid the busy Tempo weekend. The location will provide access to band equipment, technology, and space to run a few more interactive sessions. Keynote speaker, Darrell Chrispwill be talk on “Creating an Effective Classroom Environment” and conduct a demo lesson with participants. A panel discussion will feature last year’s new teachers discussing a range of topics including their participation in the mentor visits. After lunch there will be a hands-on session on repertoire selection, planning and possibly classroom management. With a $20 registration (which includes lunch!) and easy online registration, we hope to attract many beginning band directors and some experienced band directors to join the conversation. The input of experienced band directors is an invaluable part of the day.

Respectfully submitted,
Barb Dowsett, Chairperson

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