

The Future of Music Education: Music Performance Assessment

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In contemplating the role of Music Performance Assessment (MPA) in the context of music education for the students of Florida, a committee might consider several areas to explore. One would be identifying the positive aspects of the MPA model as it exists. A second exploration area would be the identification of possible needs or refinements of the MPA model to better meet the needs of Florida's students. Certainly, reflection on the demands that future trends might require would be an important area to explore in the overall exercise. And, of course, addressing existing concerns that have been posed to the committee would be of high priority. These were the tasks as the discussion began by the members of the committee on Music Performance Assessment as a subcommittee of FMEA's Future of Music Education committee. Other areas of exploration surely exist, and as the conversation progresses, greater refinement in the reflective process will materialize.

Selected for their experience and expertise, the committee members represent all of the FMEA component organizations that participate in MPA and are also representative of the entire spectrum of grade levels affected by MPA. Committee members include Shawn Barat, Jeanie Berry, Dale Choate, Kathy Cook, Beth Cummings, Frank Howes, Mark Spreen, Jessica Talbott and Dr. Kenneth Williams. What follows is a short narrative that attempts to encapsulate the conversations of the committee, including observations, problems, solutions and at times open-ended questions that will require continued dialogue.

Positive Aspects of the MPA Model

The performance opportunity afforded by participation at MPA allows for specific goals, both technical and musical, for both students and teachers. The MPA evaluation provides a benchmark of accountability for the success of the performance program in each school. It may sound cliché, but the things that get measured are the things that get taught. Therefore, opportunity for assessment should help raise the level of performance. Students and teachers benefit from the feedback of experienced and trained professionals through both written and verbal comments. This feedback is especially beneficial for students in the Solo and Ensemble MPA.

Through MPA, both students and teachers have the opportunity to observe other performing ensembles. This affords quality performance models, the demonstration of quality literature and an opportunity for students and teachers to develop higher-order thinking skills through the analysis and evaluation of the ensembles they observe. MPA also allows for parents and the community to better appreciate the value of their music program through the process of performance assessment based on a standard, without the emphasis on physical reward.

Needs/Refinements of the MPA Model

Often there are unintended consequences as a result of any event or decision. In the context of MPA, one such a consequence occurs when the ratings, which are used as a benchmark of a performance standard, become a competitive issue. This may occur when principals, parents and the community value only the ratings or the number of students participating, instead of what the rating represents, which is an accomplishment based on a performance standard or students' growth over time. The competitive element will also emerge when students measure their success based on their perception of "beating" another performing ensemble. FMEA should continue to work toward consistency and fairness in the assessment process. Additionally, education should be provided so the assessment is used in a positive manner by the teacher to help students understand the assessment of their performance and how that performance can improve.

The written and verbal comments of the adjudicator should be used as a teaching/learning opportunity in the classroom to provide meaningful feedback from experts in the field. The added value of direct and private feedback to the teacher/conductor is essential for improving instruction and thereby improving the performance success of the students. FMEA should expand the opportunities in all MPA formats to increase the opportunity for direct and private feedback to the teacher/conductor.

Some of our component organizations provide incentive for students and teachers to observe other ensemble performances to foster their ability to analyze and evaluate as well as experience exceptional performance models. Expansion of this expectation would bring added value to the MPA experience for all students and teachers. Parents and administrators will also benefit from the opportunity to have a broader comparison for assessing the success of their school's music program.

Future Trends

Looking toward the future, it is incumbent upon FMEA to identify and target specific aspects of the MPA model for refinement or growth. The following bullets are suggestions for future action or discussion:

- To further the educational process and training of adjudicators, the Adjudication committee of each component association will conduct a yearly audit of the MPA process in selected districts. This audit will address the quality of the adjudication and the administration of the MPA and will assess the need for refinement or improvement.
- The component associations will review the standards of excellence presently in place. Each association will educate its membership in an effort to improve the quality of performance standards.
- Component associations should eliminate exceptions to rules, which contribute to a lowering of performance standards.
- The FSMA Executive Board should investigate ways and means to raise the awareness of the Florida School Board Association, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents and the Florida Association of Secondary School Principals of the potential abuse that occurs in some competitive festival events that are not sanctioned by the Florida School Music Association.
- Members of the FSMA Executive Board should raise awareness of music education as it relates to MPA by addressing the Florida School Board Association, the Florida

Association of District School Superintendents and the Florida Association of Secondary School Principals on a yearly basis.

- At the district and state levels:
 - Provide videotaping of the teacher/conductor during MPA performances with feedback from a commentator who has proven to be an expert in the field.
 - Commentators should be selected through an application and screening process devised by the Adjudication committee of the component associations.
- In an effort to increase administrators' awareness of the MPA process and significance, administrators should be given special recognition at the event to encourage them to attend. An invitation should be drafted and sent from FSMA. The district leadership would send a schedule to all principals with a return form that asks the principal how he/she would like to be introduced.
- Accepting the premise that MPA serves as professional development, teachers should be required to observe other ensembles in performance and informally assess those performances. These observations could become talking points at a post-MPA discussion/dinner at the district level. This discussion time would allow for reflection on the professional gains through the experience and identification of best practices in preparation and of strategies for performance that will improve future teaching.
- Create a student assessment form that students would use as they observe other performing ensembles. The goal would be to promote critical thinking skills and discrimination of best practices in musical performance.

Concerns/Suggestions and Committee Responses

The following are concerns and suggestions voiced to the committee and the response generated through the committee's discussion and the sharing of solutions already in use by some of our creative colleagues. Some concerns have direct solutions, and others require continued contemplation and creativity. (Concerns are in bold type.)

Cost of transportation

The increases in transportation costs are a growing concern due to limited available funds. In large districts, using more than one performance site and transporting adjudicators from one site to the next would help lower costs.

Submission of performance tapes to central adjudication panel for evaluation to eliminate travel cost

This process could solve the problem of travel expense and provide feedback to the ensemble and teacher; however, what is lost are the many added opportunities in the positive aspects of MPA that are outlined in the accompanying article.

Development of adjudication opportunities for alternative ensembles

An MPA for alternative ensembles might be incorporated into the existing Solo and Ensemble MPA. Perhaps there should be an "alternative component" organization.

Scheduling difficulties

Scheduling difficulties must be addressed at the district level, with communication and cooperation between component associations.

Technology

Explore ways that technology might enhance MPA. Expand the opportunities for students to demonstrate musical artistry through the use of technology.

Changing demographics

The current band/choir/orchestra model does not meet the changing needs of our student populations. This is a major concern and should be addressed by a committee that specifically addresses the present band/choir/orchestra model.

School participation (in a situation in which a teacher requests to attend MPA, and the administration is non-supportive)

Improve communication with supervisors and administrators to target the purpose and importance of Music Performance Assessment as a teaching/learning opportunity as well as an assessment tool. The executive directors of the component associations (or their designees) should contact schools to identify means to assist teachers in attending MPA.

Certainly there are many more issues, and this dialogue must be ongoing. One thing is certain. Change is inevitable. Continuing to focus on the purpose of assessment and the role it plays in the musical training of Florida's students, along with thoughtful consideration of the intent of MPA and its function, will allow for refinement of this system that already brings great benefit to students and teachers alike. Each and every member of FMEA must be a part of this important conversation.