ADJUDICATED ORCHESTRA FESTIVALS: CONSTRUCTING A MODEL FOR NEW JERSEY

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Abstract

This project examines the various practices and considerations involved in staging and participating in large ensemble adjudicated orchestra festivals in the United States. By exploring the literature on the psychology of student competition, various methods of adjudication, the history of adjudicated ensemble festivals in the United States, and other pertinent information, a set of best practices was extracted to aid in creating a proposal for an “All-State Orchestra Festival” for the state of New Jersey. An examination of the literature showed that increased student motivation, the ability for students to observe their peers, and feedback from knowledgeable adjudicators are among the numerous positive benefits available to students and teachers through participation in adjudicated orchestra festivals. However, there are numerous pitfalls such as maintaining scoring reliability, how directors approach their curriculum in preparation for competition, managing students’ expectations, and the logistical considerations of creating and managing a festival that need to be considered before a model for New Jersey can be created.
Adjudicated Orchestra Festivals

Attendance at large ensemble festivals has become commonplace across the country and many music educators believe festivals are a valuable tool to use in order to gauge the progress of their ensembles (Rawlings, 2015). Barnes and McCashin (2012) found that 39 states in the United States were currently providing some variation of a festival for school orchestras. These were sponsored by state music education associations, local band and orchestra directors groups, or the American String Teachers Association (ASTA). In the state where I teach, New Jersey, there is no adjudicated large group festival for string ensembles.

In my teaching practice I have seen how the band festival environment and several smaller commercial festivals around the state are used to the benefit of those programs and students. I believe there is the potential to gain greater exposure for students and orchestra programs, as well as increase students’ self-efficacy and motivation through the festival environment. In my quest to provide greater musical enrichment for students, I see a wasted opportunity, one that could be realized by developing an orchestra festival experience for the thousands of string students currently enrolled in orchestra programs around New Jersey. Through this document I hope to provide a foundation for building that experience for my own students, as well as others throughout the state.

The purpose of this Capstone Project was to look at the why, what, and how of holding such an event for the orchestra students and teachers in New Jersey. The guiding questions for the project included:

1. What is the history of orchestra festivals in the United States?
2. What formats and procedures are used in festivals currently taking place in the United States?
3. What is known about the effect of competitive festival environments on students and teachers?

4. How can a festival establish valid and reliable adjudication systems that benefit both students and teachers?

5. What might a model for a New Jersey State Orchestra Festival look like?

**History**

According to Rohrer (2002), instrumental ensembles in the schools were first created in the late 19th century to perform at school functions and usually consisted of students who studied their instruments with teachers outside of school. Within several decades the idea of scholastic ensembles and their value in education earned them status as credit worthy classes in high schools across America. Despite the fact that orchestras outnumbered bands in the early 20th century, after World War I the popularity of military bands contributed to a trend towards decreased enrollment in orchestras across the country.

It was around this time that competitions between ensembles began to take place, with the first state-wide orchestra competition organized in 1915 by Frank Beach in the state of Kansas (Rohrer, 2002). During this same time period, students were able to participate in the first all-state orchestra, which was organized in Indiana in 1922 by Ralph C. Sloan for the purpose of trying to motivate and recognize talented high school musicians (Hash, 2009). It would be this mission that would continue to serve as the central motivator for scholastic music competition in the United States. It would not be until March 2004 however that the first National Orchestra Festival was held, sponsored by the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) after a proposal by Dr. Robert Gillespie to the ASTA executive board (Litrell, 2007). Its goal was to
create a festival that would represent some of the highest quality school orchestra programs in the country (David, 2007).

According to Rohrer (2002), the earliest contests were not uniform in nature; they were arranged in a variety of formats. Some were local competitions between school rivals and some were sponsored by music companies or local professional musical groups. The difficulties with these privately run festivals were largely the same as the issues we see with privately run adjudicated festivals today. Problems in standards of adjudication, number of judges, required versus free choice of repertoire selection, and other issues that can vary wildly between festivals created numerous headaches for directors. It was the National Conference of Music Supervisors (precursor to the National Association for Music Education - NAfME) that met in 1922 to create a committee on instrumental affairs, which among its goals was to remove these issues by defining a set of best practices for festival organizers to follow.

It was this committee who would meet to discuss staging the first national band contest, which was held in Chicago on June 4-6, 1923 (Rohrer, 2002). Ironically, that first event was criticized for its lack of organization. But in 1924, the committee on instrumental affairs met again to refine and produce a set of standards for national competitions that could be followed by music educators around the country and remove the need for private adjudicated festivals from the landscape. The committee would go on to create the National School Band Association in 1926, specifically to cater to the needs of band competitions. Also, that same year they created the first National High School Orchestra, run by Joseph E. Maddy (Hash, 2009), to serve as the first national honors orchestra. It was this orchestra and its performance at the National Education Association’s national conference that would set the bar for what would become a trend towards increased participation in scholastic music ensembles (Rohrer, 2002).
In the 1930’s another shift happened. As the competitive environment was becoming more commonplace, there was a move towards more localized contest formats. During this period, as the Great Depression created turmoil around the country, the costs associated with travel became unwarranted in a scholastic environment and the local festival became more appealing. By 1937, the national sponsorship of contests had ceased as different formats (band, orchestra, choir) and regionalized groups became the new standard. In 1938, the first *Report Bulletin* even produced a survey on festival participation across the country that showed the massive numbers of participants in ensemble competitions. Three hundred forty-two bands (20,766 students), 111 orchestras (5,661 students), and 194 vocal groups (8,224 students) participated in regional competitions that year. Competitive festivals, while proceeding to be in and out of favor over the decades would continue to become a regular part of the landscape of music education through today (Rohrer, 2002).

The literature tells us that the history of adjudicated orchestra festivals in the United States mirrors the history of orchestra education in this country. It has seen a series of progresses, set backs and evolutions over the last century. We can also see that thousands of students and teachers have found value in competition through their continued participation. Also, that the stated goals of festival organizers, like the instrumental affairs committee, involved promoting student achievement and emphasized student growth as opposed to head to head competitions and that educators prefer festivals run by other educators.

**Competition**

Going back to those very first school music competitions over a century ago there were discussions on the value of encouraging student competition through music (Rohrer, 2002). The challenge in promoting competition, as it was stated, was to reap the rewards of a system that
values and encourages student achievement without letting the competitive environment become an end unto itself. That argument is much the same today as it was then, with the added demand on educators of demonstrating not just student achievement, but also student growth.

The committee on instrumental affairs identified some of the same pitfalls in competitions in the 1920s and 1930s that we find today. Rohrer (2002) points out that instrumental affairs committee member E.H. Wilcox declared “If music competitions are of value only as an opportunity for winning prizes, they are not of value for intelligent supervisors” (p. 39). This early defiance against the competitive aspect of orchestra festivals was also demonstrated in the 1930s when the committee promoted a change in nomenclature. The term competition itself was identified as needing to be phased out and replaced with the term festival in order to downplay those aspects the committee did not feel represented the spirit of scholastic music festivals. This change in nomenclature is also supported today by those like Hash (2013), who also argues for the use of the festival title over competition.

Kohn (1986) suggested that the prevalence of competition in music is based upon a number of commonly shared beliefs that have become myths used to further the case of those who encourage competition. The first myth that exists according to Kohn is that competition is an innate characteristic of human nature. He instead suggests that like most other human traits, competitiveness is a learned trait. He believed that it is the high level of esteem placed on competition, and winners, by our society that serve to reinforce its value. The second myth is that competition serves as a significant motivator for students. Kohn suggests that while this can in fact be true for some students it is not true for all and for the “losers” in a competitive setting it will likely have the opposite effect.
Kohn’s (1986) third myth is that competition serves to improve character in individuals. Abeles, Hoffer, and Klotman (1995) believe that this is because of a misunderstanding between improving student character and improving student competence. Suggesting that the process of increasing student competence that accompanies the preparation for and successful completion of a competitive act is responsible for the associated increase in student self esteem. The last myth suggested by Kohn (1986) is that by its very nature competition serves to exult those who are victorious, but in order to do so it excludes all others.

Despite acknowledging the risks in promoting competition based on these myths, Ables et al. (1995) suggest that competition can afford students the ability to celebrate their accomplishments and the advancement of student competence that is achievable through cooperative learning. This requires that a well-defined view of competition be provided by the director to ensure that students have a clear understanding of their directors expectations in a competitive setting. The expectation should be to demonstrate competence through performance and to do so by establishing a cooperative environment in the classroom. That way competition may provide a service by becoming a means of celebrating students progress in acquiring new knowledge and skills.

This reinforces the idea that the most important facet in determining whether or not the value of competition is realized may stem from how the competitive environment is viewed by the educator and thus presented to their students. In a study of directors participating in both band and choral festivals, Rohrer (2002) found that festival directors skewed towards younger teachers. Through interviews and biographical data on festival participants he determined that one of the main motivations for this trend was that younger teachers saw festivals as a way to
gain notoriety for themselves and their programs, whereas older teachers did not participate in, or place the same amount of emphasis on, competition or festivals.

One other issue in regards to competition is its potential effects on curriculum design. Rawlings (2015) points out that the use of limited repertoire lists is one example of how competition can stifle the development of a well developed curriculum. Some states choose to offer ensembles only a small list of repertoire to choose from for competition. The reasoning for festival organizers is that this will allow for more reliable adjudication since performances will be easier to compare if all ensembles are performing the same or similar repertoire. Rawlings believes that directors should be allowed to choose their repertoire as to be of the greatest educational benefit to their students and that it would be detrimental for teachers to be required to have such a large portion of their curriculum be designated by mandated repertoire lists.

Another individual who has studied competition and found there are reasons to proceed with caution is Austin (1988), who suggested that competition has a tendency to serve in producing its own proponents. He determined that the amount of pleasure students derive from competition tends to directly relate to the number of competitions in which they participate. The idea that increased student motivation is one of the primary reasons for the inclusion of competition in the music curriculum comes from the idea that competition serves as an extrinsic motivator for students (Rohrer, 2002). However, Austin (1988) found a negative correlation with students’ views toward competition. He found that students who most desire success through ensemble competition tended to be the ones who performed the worst. He suggested that music competition is enjoyable and motivating for those who enjoy competition, but that those with increased motivation are not always demonstrating higher levels of musical achievement.
Hash (2013a) also makes clear his view on the relationship between competition and musical achievement when he states that ensemble adjudication and ratings do not adequately represent a measure of musical achievement. However, Austin (1988) did find that was not the case in all competition. His results demonstrated that students who participated in solo and ensemble competitions did show an increase in musical achievement. This could prompt a discussion about whether or not competition is inherently negative or whether educators need to evaluate whether small group or large group competition (or a combination of both) would be most beneficial to students.

Many of the arguments for and against ensemble competition are the same as those that are used in discussing the merits of student participation in honors ensembles (Austin, 1990). Miller (1994) discussed how the culture of competition in our society also serves to negate the positive affective and aesthetic benefits of music making. He suggested that “life for many of us in America has evolved into a series of challenges to compete” (p. 29), which aligns with Kohn’s (1986) belief that competition is a learned trait of human nature. Whether or not this is true, Miller suggests that this abundance of competition in our society has become the new reality.

Opponents of competition, like Austin (1990) and Miller (1994), have suggested that instead of utilizing competition, our ensembles should function in a more cooperative manner. Miller suggested fostering an environment where older and more advanced students mentor the younger and less mature musicians. This is supported by research that suggests the manner in which directors run their ensembles may have a distinct effect on their student’s views on competition and their success in a competitive environment (Davison, 2007). Davison’s research into the success of directors in the festival environment showed that authoritarian directors had less success than those who chose to demonstrate a willingness to lead a cooperative learning
environment. Davison (2007) found that directors who allow students to make their own musical decisions received better festival ratings than those who relied on all decisions coming from their director and did not seek out the input of students. This reinforces the value of fostering independent musicianship in our students and supports at least one of the dangers identified by Austin (1990) as a risk of adjudicated festival participation.

If the original stated goal of an honors ensemble is to motivate and recognize the achievement of student musicians (Rohrer, 2002), then the same could easily be applied to the ensemble festival format as well. Ultimately, like most things, there are strong arguments and evidence for and against the educational and psychological merits of fostering a competitive environment for performance in scholastic musical ensembles. However, I believe through examining the literature that competition may be justified if a directors and organizers focus is on celebrating the achievement and progress of student musicians. That directors should not encourage students to focus only on the end results of the competition itself, such as scores or ensemble ratings, and set clear goals pertaining to the progress of their students. It remains at the discretion of each ensemble director as to which approaches, goals, and commitment of time and resources they chose to devote to participation in music competition.

**National Overview**

In order to better understand orchestra festivals we can look across the country at the wide array of different circumstances that determine their make-up. The national landscape for adjudicated orchestra festival, as it currently stands, is broken into essentially two variations: (a) the state and regional festivals run by a variety of music educator and string educator organizations, and (b) those that are run by private or business entities. The issue of monetizing the festival experience is not one I will be addressing in this document. However, I will state that
all of the same critiques that were made about the earliest commercially sponsored festivals may still be considered relevant in discussing these festivals today. While there are certainly gains to be made from these experiences (hence their very existence) I will continue this project by discussing those festivals that are run by NAfME affiliates or other professional music educator organizations (e.g., ASTA).

Barnes and McCashin (2005) undertook a 50 state survey of adjudicated orchestra festivals (AOF) which they defined as events “… organized for students and teachers of school orchestra to highlight performance achievement and receive ratings and feedback from selected judges” (p. 34). They sought to provide a comprehensive view of the presence and distribution of these festivals around the United States, along with information on how they function. They spent a year contacting teachers and representatives from all 50 states with a detailed survey that included multiple choice, open ended, and free response questions related to AOF’s in their respective states.

In all, they discovered that thirty-nine states hold AOFs, with 18 festivals being organized by music educator associations and the other 21 being organized by other groups (such as ASTA). The Eastern division (NAfME) as a whole had the lowest percentage of states with AOF’s, as only 5 of 11 states held festivals. However, the findings of Barnes and McCashin (2005) show that in the majority of states in the country, school orchestra directors had access to these events, which were run and adjudicated under the supervision of professional educators. This is somewhat behind the band world, where forty-five states provided a large-group adjudicated experience for middle school/junior high bands and 49 offered large-group assessment for high school bands as of 2010 (Paul, 2010).
Since these festivals are run by professional educators, the presumption is that they are festivals designed and refined with a focus on providing a personally, musically, and educationally enriching experience for students and teachers. Barnes and McCashin (2005) went into great detail measuring the different stances and procedures for running a festival, looking at everything from adjudication methods and procedures to whether or not festivals provided refreshments for students or lamps for judges. They made a number of recommendations based on what they found, rationalizing that if the practice was in place in the majority of festivals around the country, it could be considered standard operating procedure. This doesn’t limit all discretion from festival creation, but it does leave us with a smaller range of issues and procedures to be left up for debate.

One of the first issues facing directors seeking to attend an AOF is convincing administrators and other stakeholders (parents, school board members, etc.) of the value of festival participation in order to allow and encourage them to participate. It was a recommendation of Barnes and McCashin (2005) that organizing groups provide a letter, or make available some document to participating directors that lists and explains some of the benefits of festival participation to those who are unfamiliar with the practice. This could be provided to those stakeholders who may not understand the importance of such experiences to students’ musical, as well as overall, education. One of their main arguments to administrators, for example, was that since student self assessment is encouraged so greatly in modern educational practice, students require the knowledge of the quality and abilities of various peer groups, which can only be observed in such environments as these, in order to do so.

There still may be practical and logistical complications which may prevent groups from participating in festivals. Transportation and conflicts with after-school programs such as
athletics may prompt some districts to want to send students on trips only during school hours. However, other school districts may not allow trips during school hours, necessitating performance times only after school or on weekends. As such, one of the recommendations of Barnes and McCashin (2005) was offering some variety in scheduling options for participating groups. Even offering performance opportunities on multiple dates, as well as multiple times and multiple locations, can help mitigate these potential scheduling conflicts. Holding a festival as a “series” of individual events that are all run similarly and provide a comparable experience between them as opposed to a single large event may be a strategy that festival organizers wish to consider (Barnes & McCashin, 2005).

Most AOFs are being run by a committee or committees sponsored by music educators organizations. In order to fund their festivals, 38 states operated using the help of registration fees ranging from $50-$200, with an average fee of $108 (Barnes & McCashin, 2005). These fees were typically used to pay for adjudicators, print programs, and provide materials such as adjudication sheets, refreshments for adjudicators and volunteers, and pay for any other miscellaneous expenses. It was the recommendation of Barnes and McCashin that sites be provided by host schools or universities free of charge, so that fees could be kept to a minimum, although it is sometimes necessary to accrue incidental expenditures as part of operating a festival.

It was also a recommendation of Barnes and McCashin (2005) that student and director refreshments be available for participants at their own expense, since participants will often spend a large period of time at an event site. It was highly recommended that participating groups take advantage of the festival experience to watch the performances of other groups. Through this, students may gain a greater understanding of the abilities of their peers and a
greater appreciation of the orchestra repertoire. They also recommended that performance opportunities be made available to both middle and high school students. Other research has found the benefits of festival participation in the motivation levels of band students starting as young as elementary school (Austin, 1988).

The question of what to play in performance for a festival is always a difficult decision for music teachers. From the survey conducted by Barnes and McCashin (2005), it was found that 54% of states choose to require either two or three concert selections while 36% choose to set a required performance time rather than a number of musical selections. The most frequently allotted amounts of time were 20 minutes for middle school groups and 30 minutes for high school groups. Only 14 states required schools to choose from a set list of literature. However, it was highly recommended that states provide a recommended repertoire list for schools, or make available access to standard lists like those produced by the states of New York or Virginia (Barnes & McCashin, 2005).

The question of whether or not to include sight-reading as part of the AOF experience is one that is far less standardized than other performance requirements. Only 49% of states chose to require sight-reading part of the adjudicated portion of the festival, with another 13% offering it as optional. Barnes and McCashin (2005) greatly encouraged festival organizers to provide directors at least the option of a sight-reading experience. As a demonstration of musical understanding, it is very likely that sight-reading may actually be a greater demonstration of musical knowledge than a rehearsed piece for performance (Rohrer, 2002). The ability of an ensemble to perform a piece of music in a matter of minutes is considered to be an excellent measure of the musical intelligence of a group of students.
Logistically, it was advised that festival organizers provide a basic printed program to give information such as a schedule of performers and performance times, directors names, performance repertoire, etc. (Barnes & McCashin, 2005). This is both to aid in the actual running of the festival and also to give participants something to take with them. There doesn’t seem to be a consensus in regards to trophies or awards other than that some festivals use them and some don’t. However, to keep the costs of the festivals down it was recommended that if they are to be used that they should be inexpensive in order to minimize expenditures.

Overall, Barnes and McCashin (2005) suggested that “while the focus of an AOF should be to create a positive learning experience for the director and student musicians, there are myriad details that go into the planning and execution of these events” (p. 34). Therefore, it is important that festival organizers not overlook the practical and logistical implications of directors travelling with students. Concerns such as scheduling, travel distance, food and drink for students and organizers, the physical comfort of festival participants, and the academic impact of missed class time must not be overlooked (Barnes & McCashin, 2005). In other research, the most frequently cited negative issues from festival participants (Garman, 2002) were related to not finding enough orchestra/string judges and the quality of performance venues.

While there is no consensus right way or wrong way to organize an adjudicated orchestra festival in the United States, Barnes and McCashin (2005) do help in presenting some of the questions that will need to be asked in creating a proposal for a festival in New Jersey. As well as show how these questions are being addressed by other states around the country. While it is likely that many facets of a festival for New Jersey will align with states elsewhere, there will still be a need to create and modify solutions to serve the needs of festival organizers in that state.
Adjudication

One of the most difficult aspects of establishing an orchestra festival is setting up a system to fairly and consistently adjudicate participants. In order to do this, the overriding philosophy of how and why groups are being adjudicated must first be determined. Garman (1991) felt that if a festival is structured so that judges rate a performance in relation to the performances of other groups, say for a first place award, perhaps that festival is a competition. On the other hand, if each group is evaluated in relation to some fixed standard irrespective of the evaluations of other groups participating than it would qualify as a festival. For educational purposes Garman recommended that evaluating students against a fixed standard of performance would be significantly preferable to a peer versus peer competition.

Another important distinction that must be decided on is whether or not to offer ratings or scores to participants. Hash (2003), in his overview on the state of orchestra festivals around the country, stated that ensemble contest ratings are not designed to measure musical learning at all. His view is that it is more educationally beneficial for judges to focus on providing critique and feedback in the course of an ensemble’s performance, and this should be their primary responsibility along with having time to clinic with festival participants. However, in practice this is frequently not the case. Barnes and McCashin (2005) found that only 28% of states provided a clinic with judges for high school students, with that number climbing to 33% for middle/junior high school students.

As finding qualified adjudicators for strings was shown by Garman (1991) to be one the biggest complaints with festival organizers, some states choose to recruit both inside and outside of their respective geographic regions. To this end, very few organizations require that their judges be residents of their respective regions. The main reason they felt that it would be
preferable for judges to be local was so as not to incur any added travel expenses. In most states, judges were found to be selected by an organizing coordinator or committee. They also found that the majority of judges were coming equally from the K-12 teaching ranks and collegiate faculty, with a small percentage coming from “other” sources (i.e. - professional musicians, conductors, etc.).

Providing an environment where the adjudication has a high level of reliability is a serious concern when sourcing qualified judges from different areas. Brakel (2006) undertook an evaluation of the reliability of adjudication at the Indiana All State Band Festival. His research reinforced several commonly held beliefs, such as that judging panels of three or more adjudicators demonstrated higher levels of reliability, and that in years where adjudicator training sessions were held, scores exhibited higher levels of reliability. The significance of judge training appeared to be an important factor in establishing scoring reliability.

Another major concern of festival participants is the practice of using judges without a background in strings to judge string ensembles. Brakel (2006) looked at the practice of using band educators to judge orchestra. His data suggested that on average, those judges with orchestra backgrounds went on to score orchestras lower than those with backgrounds in band. In order to address this issue, Indiana focused half of its training in 2002 to non-orchestral judges judging orchestras, and as a result the judges’ reliability was shown to increase significantly. Brakel suggested that while it is not preferable to use non-orchestra judges in judging orchestra festivals, significant importance should be placed on the training of qualified judges regardless of field in order to minimize issues related to reliability.

In order to increase the overall performance of judges it is also recommended that festivals limit judges responsibilities to a maximum of seven to eight hours (Barnes &
McCashin, 2005). This is primarily in order to promote quality judging, as it is likely that a judges’ ability to expertly evaluate performances could significantly diminish after observing fifteen or more ensembles over the course of a day. There is the added benefit of increasing the overall quality of the judges’ experience, making it more appealing to potential judges in order to help recruit and retain qualified candidates. Barnes and McCashin (2005) found that $150 per day was the most frequently awarded rate of pay for judges, with various festivals ranging from between $75-300. In order to make judging more appealing, 89% of states also provided free meals for judges, and most states offered an audience free area for judges as well as their own tables and lighting.

In looking at a variety of festival environments, Garman (1991) found that most adjudication forms contained six performance categories, or standards against which adjudication should be measured. The performance categories most likely to be included were; tone, intonation, technique, balance, interpretation, musical effect, and “other factors.” Judges were usually provided with descriptions of the various standards of achievement and then asked to rate each performance against the standard. Barnes and McCashin (2005) found that among festivals, 54% had no official rules on whether or not judges were allowed to confer with one another during adjudication, while 13% of festival organizers discouraged it, and 31% encouraged collaboration between judges.

In regards to standards for adjudication, Garman (1991) went so far as to offer the following list of considerations for festival organizers:

1. The profession needs to re-examine some of the categories, especially general effect and selection, on such adjudication forms. There is a particular need to re-think the
descriptors for the various categories and to include descriptors that will have a common meaning for all adjudicators.

2. Guidelines for adjudicators need to provide more and better information regarding the use of the categories in arriving at a final rating. Descriptors for the various categories should be well defined.

3. Some type of adjudicator orientation should be developed to ensure that adjudicators have a common understanding of the terms, the categories, and their use in arriving at the final ratings.

4. Festival managers should be careful to avoid any comments either prior to or during the evaluation festival that might inadvertently bias judges toward leniency in their ratings of orchestras from programs that are in early stages of development. Evaluation festivals should provide as accurate and objective ratings as possible. (Garman, 1991, p. 23)

Barnes and McCashin (2005) found that 74% of states used three judges for the concert portion, while 51% chose to use a separate judge for sight-reading and two states went so far as to hire a judge specifically for conductors. A common alternative among 65% of states was to have an option for groups to go unscored and only receive comments on their performance from judges. This could allow for opportunities for those who do not believe in promoting scored competition to allow their students to gain additional input on their performances and development of their ensembles. Some states in the survey also chose to hold sight-reading adjudication in a separate location but this was found to be for practical considerations, such as allowing performance venues and judges to be used more efficiently.
In the process of evaluating performances it has been found that multiple nonmusical factors may potentially influence contest scores. These include (a) performance order, (b) race of performers and conductors, (c) ensemble names or labels, (d) judges’ training and experience, (e) familiarity with the repertoire and medium under evaluation, (f) length of the contest day, (g) difficulty of repertoire, (h) ensemble size, (i) conductor expressivity, (j) participation of exceptional learners, and (k) types of adjudication forms used (Garman, 1991). Related to this, Price (2006) found that there was no correlation between a conductor’s rating and an ensembles’ scores for musical expression within festival ratings. In fact, an ensemble’s performance ratings for expressivity were found only to minimally correlate with overall adjudication scores. Additionally, Silvey (2009) found that various band labels (i.e. wind ensemble, concert band, symphonic band, etc.) also did not have a significant impact on the way that evaluators rated high school band performances regardless of the judges experience.

One of the major questions in establishing a system of adjudication for a festival is the role of sight-reading in an ensembles evaluation. In their survey of orchestra festivals Barnes and McCashin (2005) found that of the 39 states that currently offer an AOF, 19 states (49%) offered sight-reading. This was actually higher than the 42% of band festivals that offer sight-reading (Paul, 2010). Another five states offered orchestras the option of participating in sight-reading (not included in the initial 19), and 13 states did not offer sight-reading options at their AOF (Barnes & McCashin, 2005).

Some who choose not to include sight-reading do so because of the sentiment that sight-reading is not as teachable as performance practice. To counter any notion that you cannot teach sight-reading, Casey (1991) investigated the sight-reading practices of 15 successful directors prior to attending adjudicated performances. Results indicated that those teachers who taught
students a systematic part analysis that was applied to each piece before each sight-reading exercise had greater success than those who left students alone to study the piece at their own discretion. Casey (1991) further determined that the teachers’ ability to identify issues of concern, articulate and efficiently demonstrate solutions, and drill students in those areas were the factors most critical to their groups’ success.

Paul (2010) chose to reference the 1994 national standards (MENC, 1994) in relation to the value of including sight-reading as part of festival adjudication. He posited that if researchers’ theories concerning evaluation would ultimately prove to be a positive influence on attitudes both toward the instructional practices of sight-reading, that it could prove beneficial for middle and high school (band) directors to continue to dialog about the possible merits of required sight-reading at local and district festivals. Further, if these postulations are accurate, participation in large group adjudicated band festivals that include delineated categories of achievement might at a minimum stimulate discussions concerning best practices and serve as a platform from which to continue development of classroom learning standards that align with the national music standards, including Content Standard Five, as it relates specifically to sight-reading objectives for students in grades five and above who participate in a choral or instrumental ensemble.

Barnes and McCashin (2005) found that on average orchestra festivals that provided sight-reading allowed between 3 and 30 minutes for participants to study their music, with 7 minutes being the most commonly allotted time. They found several different musical elements being assessed, with technical accuracy, interpretation and musical effect being the most common. States were shown to vary significantly in how sight-reading scores are factored into
an ensembles overall rating, with two states using sight-reading as an entirely separate rating from the performance of prepared repertoire.

My examination of the literature on the topic of adjudication shows that organizers should focus on two areas. The first is that in order to provide reliable adjudication to ensembles it is the responsibility of festival organizers to provide frequent, high quality training to judges who are string specialists. The second focus of adjudication for festival organizers should be on providing highly informed feedback to performers and directors as to how to promote the continued development of their students and ensembles.

**Teacher Evaluation**

It may seem inevitable that in the process of looking for various means of measuring student achievement in music education the use of a standardized festival rating would seem to be a valuable piece of data. The discussion on whether or not festival performance is a valid measure of student achievement has crossed a threshold from theory to potential application. To go along with the prospect of student evaluation stemming from festival performance ratings, the added prospect of using festival ratings as a means of teacher evaluation have also been discussed by various parties around the country. In the state of Michigan, Shaw (2014) found while surveying music educators throughout the state that while most teachers agreed that skill growth could be measured through a student’s individual musical performance, teachers mostly sided against using ensemble performance scores as a measure of student growth.

One of the reasons suggested by Paul (2014) for this aversion was the potential reliance on a single performance as the means of measuring progress. He suggests that while an ensemble rating could in some ways be demonstrative of a summative assessment, without a pre-assessment there would be no way of measuring the growth of that ensemble through a school
year. Also, measuring an ensemble’s performance rating year to year could be a flawed assessment if all circumstances surrounding that group were not taken into consideration, such as the turnover rate between student participants, or that not all festival ratings should be considered equal. Paul suggested there may even be a risk of tampering as directors showed serious concerns about the possibility of teacher’s or school’s ability of falsely inflating scores.

When Hash (2013b) looked at several issues related to reliability of ratings between festivals he pointed out that “large-group festivals do not measure individual skills or musicianship, and only to some extent do they assess the improvement of an ensemble from one academic year to the next as a result of differences in personnel, repertoire, and adjudicators” (p. 165). His conclusions were that while contest ratings do provide valid assessments of student achievement, they do so only in relation to group performance on a narrow range of tasks and addressing a limited number of national standards. Furthermore, ratings might not adequately indicate the true quality of an ensemble’s performance or measure growth from one year to the next. Hash does note that festivals could serve to evaluate some measure of achievement and may provide meaningful data as part of an assessment system that includes multiple and varied measures.

In Michigan, the state unit of the Society for Music Teacher Education (2011) has created a policy statement on music teacher evaluation that suggests that music teachers and their administrators consider the following points:

1. All organizations that sponsor rated festivals should establish and periodically calculate statistical reliability (consistency) for ratings generated at these events, and provide data indicating the average rating and frequency counts for each final rating (I–V) issued within a particular classification, and for all participants combined. These data
ORCHESTRA FESTIVALS

will serve as norms used to compare individual results with those of similar groups. This effort may require the assistance of college faculty or others knowledgeable in statistics and education research.

2. Festival ratings are valid to the extent that they measure an ensemble’s performance of two or three selections, and sight-reading ability, at one point in time. They furthermore only provide assessment for one of the five Michigan Music Standards and related benchmarks. A complete assessment of student growth requires multiple and varied measures of musicianship and musical understanding.

3. Teachers never should be required to attend a particular festival or use the results of these events as value-added data in their annual evaluation. Music educators who choose to use this data as part of their evaluation should do so voluntarily and as one of multiple measures of student growth.

4. Teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in music education should be aware of the numerous factors that can influence performance adjudication. According to the extant research, these might include (a) conductor and performer appearance, (b) performance order, (c) repertoire selection, (d) adjudicator experience and background, (e) adjudicator knowledge of special circumstances, (f) the evaluation form, and (g) adjudication procedures. . . . All of these nonmusical factors may contribute to measurement error and reduce the statistical reliability (consistency) of the final scores. Furthermore, ratings do not account for circumstances related to instruction such as rehearsal scheduling, financial support, staffing, or other factors that might influence instruction, student achievement, and the quality of the final performance, most of which
are out of the teacher’s control (Michigan Society for Music Teacher Education, 2011, p. 4–5).

Consequently, Hash (2013b) suggested it is probably best to consider festivals as formative assessments from which teachers can derive and assess learning objectives for individual students and their ensembles. It was his recommendation that if viewed from these perspectives, it is evident that using the ensemble festival as a means of student or teacher evaluation should not be encouraged at any level. As part of a teacher or student’s portfolio of work it is fair to view the festival performance as a valid assessment, but nothing more.

**Thoughts for future discussion**

During the course of obtaining references for this project several topics appeared to be either insufficiently covered by current literature or have not been investigated formally. Further study of these topics could potentially provide additional insight into the benefits and structure of adjudicated orchestra festivals. Additionally, there is much material that is nearing the end of its useful lifespan as students, and subsequently their motivations, have changed much in the decades since those studies were conducted.

It would be interesting to compare the different levels and sources of motivation among festival participants of different ages. One of the prime developmental goals for music students is facilitating their transfer from extrinsic to intrinsic sources of motivation. So by understanding how those motivational factors shift as students mature could be useful to determining which age groups would benefit most from festival participation. As of now, most festivals are being attended by senior and junior high school musicians. It is my recommendation in developing a festival for New Jersey that the festival be open to students in grades six through twelve to provide the festival experience for as many students as possible. However, it is possible that
younger students could benefit from participation as well but more information is needed about practical concerns and the long term effects of festival participation.

Through my reading I found that one of the most important aspects of providing quality and reliable adjudication for festival participants was in the training of festival judges (Garman, 2002). Typically, this training is done in a traditional professional development setting, conducted face to face with a single presenter. It would be potentially useful to determine whether a technologically enhanced program could be used to provide training with greater convenience, multiple presenters, embedded media samples, and the ability to continually update the program design. A study comparing a digital training platform versus a traditional one, and its effect on scoring reliability, might be very useful to festival planners around the country. It could also potentially lead to the development of a high quality platform produced to be used on a national level.

As music education has advanced in different ways around the world it could be beneficial to look at an international survey of adjudicated orchestra festivals in largely the same format as was found in the study by Barnes and McCashin (2005). By looking at many of the same issues examined in this paper (background, adjudication, student participation, etc.) there is the potential of finding new understanding about how to develop festivals in the United States to their maximum potential. By looking at these issues, and how they’re dealt with on an international scale, we may be able to better evaluate the success of our programs here at home.

Some opponents of ensemble competition such as Austin (1990) noted in their work that competition in solo and ensemble festivals showed a greater impact on student’s musical achievement than ensemble festivals. It would be interesting to see how much of the information gathered during this project would be applicable to state sponsorship of a solo and ensemble
festival in New Jersey. By looking at common practice, as well as data on the benefits of chamber music performance, perhaps a similar case could be made for a state run solo and ensemble festival. For example, would the same recommendations related to adjudication and rating systems apply in a solo and ensemble setting?

The final idea that presented itself in preparing this project was how to rethink the entire conception of how music festivals exist in a digital age. Do the technical and logistical capabilities exist to run a completely digital adjudicated music festival? Some obvious benefits to such a concept include decreased transportation costs to participants, flexibility in scheduling performances for adjudication, the ability to use adjudicators from around the country (or world), and the ability to record and review performances. The ability to track performances over the course of a school year would offer the opportunity for formative assessments and feedback in addition to a summative assessment.

There are some potentially significant drawbacks to such a proposal, such as the loss of the ability of festival participants to witness peer performances and the technical concerns related to producing an audio and video broadcast capable of accurately representing the quality of an ensembles performance. However, some of this could be mitigated by the ability of ensembles to post performances on a private sharing platform for observation, and the rate of advancement in both recording and streaming technology suggest that the prospect of digital festivals may be less of a matter of if and more a matter of when. A study that compares the levels of director and student satisfaction between a digital festival experience and live adjudication could then prove to be useful to the profession.
New Jersey All State Orchestra Festival

The ultimate goal of this project was to develop a proposal for an all-state orchestra festival to be presented to the New Jersey Music Educators Association via the chairperson of the NJ All-State Orchestra Committee and current coordinator for the festival that was introduced in spring 2015. Through knowledge of the state of string education in New Jersey, my participation as part of the All-State Orchestra Rules and Procedures Committee, and my service as an executive board member of my regional MEA organization, I have attempted to distill much of the information gained from this project into producing this proposal. The completed proposal, as it will be presented, is included at the end of this project.

There are several unique issues facing string educators in New Jersey in organizing a statewide orchestra festival, not the least of which is the diversity found in the state. While orchestra programs are prevalent in the northern half of the state, the number of programs to be found in the southern half means that the far greater number of festival participants will be from the north. However, the larger geographic area in the south means that mitigating travel distances for schools located in the south becomes a major concern. Rather than recommend one site per MEA region (North, Central, South), I decided to recommend a fourth site located in the eastern part of the state in order to keep travel time for ensembles to a minimum. In doing so, this will allow orchestras in the southeastern portion of the state to have reduced travel times, not to exceed 75 minutes, to either the eastern, or southwestern site locations recommended in the proposal.

In addition to choosing site areas which would mitigate unduly long travel times the secondary goal was to find locations that would be faced with an equitable distribution of ensembles around the state. In order to deal with other scheduling issues, as discussed earlier, it
is my recommendation that there be options for ensembles to perform on multiple dates at each site. An additional benefit of multiple dates and times is that even if an ensemble could not participate in the site closest to them because of a scheduling conflict, no school in the state should ever be more than 90 minutes away from their second closest performance site.

While this could pose a potential issue for ensembles located in the extreme southeastern part of the state (Cape May County), the reality is that there is not currently a single high school orchestra program located in the entire county. Hopefully, one of the additional benefits of this festival system would be increased exposure for string programs. However, in the event there was an increase in the number of string programs in that part of the state it may be necessary to add a fifth site location as those programs would have to travel a minimum of 90 minutes, and possibly two hours or more, in order to reach the closest sites to the north or west and this would not be ideal (Barnes & McCashin, 2005).

In order to successfully execute this proposal, I suggest a committee run under the auspices of the New Jersey Music Educators Association (NJMEA). The NJMEA is a strong organization that currently runs many successful honors ensembles and festivals throughout the state. As such, I feel as if they are best suited to handle the management of such a festival. The management structure I recommend is based on the same committee structure that is currently used for the all-state honors ensembles. This familiar committee structure serves those ensembles well while distributing responsibilities through several parties located in various regions around the state, with a coordinator serving as a central organizer and unifying voice.

The greatest change from the current committee structure would be the importance of the role of judging coordinator, essentially serving in place of the auditions coordinator in the existing committee structure. It is possible, if not likely, that due to the desire not to further
expand the state committee structure beyond its current size in such a small state, the NJMEA board may not wish to add an additional committee. My alternative recommendation would be to add the festival committee responsibilities into the existing honors orchestra rules and procedures committee. While the increased responsibilities could be daunting, the reality is that many of the primary stakeholders in the state would be involved in both activities anyway, so that their unification under one banner may not be entirely unrealistic.

Due to the importance placed upon judge selection and judge training as evidenced through my review of literature (Garman, 2002), I feel as if the role of judging coordinator is perhaps the most important to the long term success of this endeavor. New Jersey’s unique location, situated between two major metropolises and cultural hubs in Philadelphia and New York, there is the ability to utilize the numerous professional musicians, conductors, and educators located in its immediate vicinity. In addition, the presence of five universities within such a small geographic area, all of which possess dedicated string faculty means that the presence of qualified judges within a reasonable travel distance of the proposed festival locations should make finding qualified judges a reasonable expectation. Managing their schedules, providing adequate training, and providing a quality experience that will have them wanting to return as adjudicators is of tantamount importance to organizing the festival (Barnes & McCashin, 2005). Judges’ pay should be commensurate with other states, their service hours should be kept to a reasonable amount of no more than eight hours, and everything within reason should be done to ensure they have a positive experience.

Additionally, since most of the judges will likely be drawn from neighboring states, I felt it would be reasonable to make the judges training a remote experience that judges could complete anywhere at their own convenience. While I did not find any evidence of digital
training taking place elsewhere during my search, it seems given the ever increasing prevalence of distance learning that utilizing some of those principles toward developing a training program could be highly useful. It is also my recommendation that this training be revised and refined as the festival evolves and is further refined as was recommended by Garman (2002).

The structure of adjudication is primarily based on the findings of Barnes and McCashin (2005), as they directly relate to common practices around the country, including those related to development of a scoring rubric. While their research did find the presence of a “general effect” scoring caption to be common, it also stated that as a category “general effect” was found to be lacking in specificity. Garman (2002) found that a “general effect” score was one of the least reliable scoring captions, which is why I decided to exclude it from my New Jersey proposal.

One of the key points of those opposing competition is the danger of producing ratings or classifications based on competitive results. Miller (1997) suggested that “very few directors, let alone students, are able to get past the number they receive and objectively analyze the comments of the adjudicators” (p. 31). For this reason, I believe it is important to avoid any sort of ratings or classification systems in a festival for New Jersey. Ensembles can still use a numerical score from the judges based upon a consistent, well designed and well defined performance rubric. This will enable directors to analyze and track their ensembles performance from this data without crossing into the dangerous scenario of an “us vs. them” competitive setting.

Additionally, I recommend the use of a recommended repertoire list to help directors chose quality repertoire for their students (Barnes & McCashin, 2005) without dictating their curriculum by mandating repertoire (Rawlings, 2015). The large amount of work that would be required to formulate a standardized repertoire list would seem to not be the best use of time to
festival organizers when there are existing resources to draw from. Although, in further refinement of the festival in the future it would not be unrealistic to commission a subcommittee of qualified candidates to produce their own list of recommended literature.

Ultimately it is not my expectation that the proposal produced by this project be adopted verbatim by the NJMEA. However, I believe that the evidence presented and the additional materials available can serve the discussion of what such a festival can look like and how it may benefit the students and educators of New Jersey. By utilizing the talents and expertise of the many dedicated teachers throughout the state, we may then begin a multi-year process in developing, refining, and sustaining such a festival.
New Jersey All-State Orchestra Festival Proposal

To: NJMEA Executive Board
Re: NJ All-State Orchestra Festival Proposal

Purpose:

Currently there is a gap in our program offerings. While we began holding an “All State Orchestra Festival” last year, we as orchestra directors have a long road to go to match the size, quality, and cohesion of what is currently offered to bands in our state. However, I think this also serves as a tremendous opportunity, one that allows us to ask questions about how to best serve our students and the string educators across the state. Enclosed is a detailed proposal, using the information gained as part of my Capstone Project while pursuing my Master of Music in Music Education degree from the University of Florida, on how best to set up a state-wide orchestra festival.

I examined various aspects of festival participation including (a) the history of adjudicated orchestra festivals in the United States, (b) the procedures and practices of adjudicated orchestra festivals among the 39 states currently providing them, (c) the merits and dangers of scholastic music competitions for students and teachers, (d) common adjudication procedures and studies pertaining to providing the highest quality and most reliable adjudication to ensembles, and (e) adjudicated festivals relationship with teacher evaluation. Through my examination of the literature I will describe a model for a state-wide adjudicated orchestra festival that takes into account these various issues while accounting for the unique circumstances of our state.
It is not my expectation that this proposal be accepted verbatim. However, I hope to present observations on common practices and research-based strategies that will help to clarify some of the issues that do need to be addressed and may potentially serve to guide the process. Many of the issues that will need to be addressed are related to personnel and logistical considerations like performance sites and scheduling. I hope that I can show that through our work we can provide a musically and educationally beneficial experience for the thousands of string students and educators around the state, on par with those available elsewhere around the country.

**Background:**

Students across the United States have been participating in adjudicated orchestra festivals since the first one was established in Kansas by Frank Beach 100 years ago in 1915 (Rohrer, 2002). As of 2005, 39 states offered an adjudicated orchestra festival for students that was organized and implemented with the help and support of professional music educators’ organizations (Barnes & McCashin, 2005). I believe that through the festival environment there is the potential to gain greater exposure for students and orchestra programs across New Jersey. By staying true to the intent of the organizers of the first professionally run ensemble festivals - to increase students’ self-efficacy and motivation - we can provide an even greater degree of musical enrichment for our students.

**Festival Outline:**

*Name* - The “NJ All-State Orchestra Festival.” The term “festival” denotes an event meant to promote the activity and seeks to mitigate any perceptions of head to head competition between ensembles.
**Participation** – The festival would be open to all scholastic orchestra ensembles grades 6 thru 12, provided the sponsoring director is a member of NJMEA (NAfME).

**Registration** – Registration should be handled via online form provided through njmea.org and managed by the festival coordinator. A registration fee of $125-150 is recommended.

**Festival Management** – It is recommended that an NJMEA Executive Board position be created with the title of “Orchestra Festival Coordinator,“ who would be responsible for running a committee of eight members consisting of two members nominated from each region and a judging coordinator. It is highly recommended the position of judging coordinator be filled with a representative from higher education who is familiar with the highest degree of string pedagogy and k-12 instrumental ensembles. The committee’s duties would be to oversee rules and procedures, site procurement, and other responsibilities associated with the continued functionality of the festival. A site coordinator, who would be responsible for coordinating with the host/facilities and be the representative of the NJMEA at the event by reporting to the “Festival Coordinator,” would be required for each site. Each site would also require a representative from the host to serve as liaison between the festival coordinator and the host facility (a site coordinator with a relationship to the host facility could serve in this role themselves), and a minimum of six onsite volunteers to adequately manage the festival. Volunteers could be current music teachers, NAfME collegiate members, retired educators or other adults deemed qualified by the site coordinator. The minimum duties required would be (a) one individual to serve in assisting the judges, (b) one individual to serve as host/announcer/timer and to assist in stage set-up, (c) one stage manager/percussion
coordinator responsible for providing any equipment requested by the participating ensembles as well as setting up the stage for each group, (d) two individuals to serve as guides to escort ensembles between locations on site, (e) one individual to coordinate the warm-up/site-reading room, and (f) one individual to monitor storage locations.

**Site/location** - Due to the geography of the state, it would be recommended that the festival not be centralized at any one site. One recommendation would be for four sites spread around the state - one located to the north in the vicinity of Morris County, one in central NJ located in the vicinity of Middlesex or Mercer Counties, one to the east in the vicinity of Ocean or Atlantic Counties, and one to the southwest in the vicinity of Gloucester or Camden Counties.

**Facilities** - It is recommended that each site contain (at minimum) (a) one performance venue large enough to host a large symphony orchestra (large enough to host the all-state orchestra), (b) the necessary equipment that ensembles might require that is non-transportable (percussion equipment and piano), (c) a secondary performance venue for ensemble warm-ups and sight-reading (i.e. – a gymnasium, large music room or cafeteria), (d) a monitored location(s) for ensembles to store equipment (cases, coats, etc.), (e) the ability to make refreshments available for students/staff (for purchase) and judges/volunteers (as a courtesy), and (f) access to two other private rooms (one for judges and one for event organizers). Ideally, these venues would be made available free of charge and insurance liability would be handled by the NJMEA, although small cost accommodations could be made in order to secure a prime location.

**Dates** - It would be best to spread the festival over multiple time periods and dates. One of the biggest challenges we face is the need to make available as many options as
possible for participants. One of the larger reasons for providing a unified state model versus a regional one, is that it allows ensembles flexibility both in terms of locations, dates and times. The best time frame for festivals would be during the months of January and February, between the end of winter break and the beginning of “musical season” in February. This serves to minimize the workload on students and educators and maximizes availability to venues. Later dates in April/May would be difficult because of the state mandated PARCC testing windows. One of the key points brought up in my study of the issues surrounding festivals is flexibility, so offering performance opportunities both during and after the school day would be essential. Each host site would be required to offer each of these scheduling windows at minimum. However, they would not necessarily need to take place on the same day, as to not overburden judges and organizers. It therefore could be recommended that each site be secured for two dates, one offered for day-time participants and the other for evening participants, or alternatively a weekend date.

_Scheduling_ – It is recommended that scheduling be broken into four hour sections during which up to six ensembles would be able to participate. Each site may wish to schedule one to three sections per day depending upon demand and practical consideration such availability. Each ensemble would then be able to select a section during which they would like to perform on a first come, first serve basis. Registration would be handled by the festival coordinator via the NJMEA website; ensembles would have the option of choosing multiple locations and sections in ranked order. They would be notified a minimum of 30 days before their performance date of when their performance time will be, and recommended that they be present onsite a minimum of 60 minutes prior to that.
Thirty minutes prior to their performance they will be allowed admittance to the secondary performance venue to warm-up, and it is in this venue where sight-reading adjudication would also take place, should the ensemble choose to participate. They would then be given 10 minutes to transfer to the performance venue, where they will be given another 30 minute window for performance and feedback.

**Ensemble Classification** – It is not recommended that the festival use a classification, grouping or ranking system. All groups should be treated as equal.

**Repertoire** – It is recommended that groups be provided with a recommended repertoire list from which to choose selections, but that its usage not be considered mandatory. Two excellent such lists are available as part of the Virginia and New York state orchestra festival programs and it is recommended the committee choose one of these to make available to directors so that they may be made aware of high quality literature they may not be familiar with.

**Sight-Reading** - Groups may choose to participate in sight-reading adjudication, which would take place in the secondary performance space prior to their performance time. Groups would need to note on their registration that they wished to take part and pieces would be chosen respective of grade level and instrumentation (junior-high, senior high, full orchestra). Groups would then have 10 minutes to set-up and warm-up before notifying the judge they are ready for adjudication, at which time the judge will provide the music to the director from and after which the group will have 10 minutes before having to perform which can be used at the directors discretion. Their final 10 minutes will be used for performance (the music selected should be short, no more than 4 minutes in length) and feedback from the adjudicator.
**Performance** – Each group will be given 30 minutes from the timer as soon as they are seated on the stage, prior to which the orchestra members should not be performing. Once the timer has announced the start of their 30 minutes the group may choose to warm-up on stage as individuals or perform an ensemble warm-up that shall not exceed 5 minutes before beginning their adjudication. The timer will give the director a 1-minute warning, after which the timer will be responsible for notifying the judges of the start of adjudication. Groups would be given the opportunity of performing one to three pieces (or movements from a larger work) for adjudication, with their total performance time not to exceed 20 minutes. The remaining time would be allotted for judges to provide feedback to ensembles. The group would then be given 5 minutes to leave the stage. This allocates a total of 30 minutes for each group; 5 to warm-up, 20 minutes to perform, and 5 minutes for on site feedback.

**Audio/Visual** – It is highly recommended that a recording be made of all performances and provided to the participating ensembles after their performance. These recordings do not need to be of a professional quality but recording devices should be placed in a location where it is possible to see and hear the ensemble without distraction from the audience. It is worth considering the possibility of partnering with a professional service to provide a professional quality audio or visual recording for an additional cost at registration if there is interest and the cost is manageable. Recordings would be the responsibility of the site coordinator. Additionally, each site would need to provide two microphones on stage, one for the announcer/timer and another in the event of the need for a soloist. It is recommended if feasible, for a wireless microphone be available for judges to communicate with the ensemble without having to move back and forth to the
stage, and allow feedback to be heard by the audience members, as students observing other ensembles may find that feedback to be educationally beneficial to themselves.

**Ranking/Scoring** – It is not recommended that the festival produce any rankings or individual awards for the festival. Scores will be provided to directors which they may choose to make publicly available at their own discretion. It may be worth considering, if the festival is successful, sponsoring an all-state orchestra gala later in the spring by inviting the top six scoring (performance scores, not sight-reading) high school and top two middle/junior-high school ensembles from around the state to perform in concert. It is worth emphasizing that scoring should be the judges secondary concern after providing exceptional feedback and critique to the ensembles. Scoring should be provided with the knowledge that it serves to show directors in a quantitative sense what area(s) may or may not need to be looked at for improvement and other internal comparisons or measures.

**Judge Selection** – The judges will be recruited, selected, trained and assigned by the judging coordinator with the help of the orchestra festival committee.

**Judge Remuneration** – A recommended fee of $150 should be provided for each festival attended by a judge, as well as refreshments and a break of 1 hour between any two 4-hour performance blocks.

**Judging Assignments** – Four judges would be recommended for adjudication, with three serving to evaluate performance and one assigned to evaluate sight-reading. In the event a group has chosen to participate in sight-reading the fourth judge could be requested (at the discretion of the site coordinator) to provide additional feedback and critique to performing ensembles with no score provided, or if no groups chose the option for a
particular event a fourth judge need not be assigned. It is highly recommended that judges not be asked to judge more than 8 hours a day. Serving for longer both reduces the quality of feedback as well as places undo mental and physical strain on judges, potentially reducing retention of qualified candidates.

**Training** – Researchers have found that the single most important factor toward reliable adjudication is judge training. Regardless of background it is recommended that the judging coordinator set-up a judges training program that should take any prospective judge no more than one hour to complete. Any judge would have to retake this training session each year they wished to participate, and would allow them to judge as many festival dates for which there was need and their schedules allowed. The training could be completed completely online at the convenience of the prospective judge and consist of providing sample scores and critique to a small number of recorded performances as well as a brief orientation video recorded by the judging coordinator detailing the judging procedures. The judging coordinator could then provide feedback or clarification to the candidates as need be, based upon their responses to those samples. While this training would potentially serve to screen any unqualified judges, it would primarily be used to provide scoring reliability by providing a consistent frame of reference for judges.

**Scoring Sheets** – The most common captions found on adjudication forms are tone, intonation, technique, balance, and interpretation. It is recommended that the committee work with the judging coordinator to construct a scoring rubric with detailed written examples of representative performance characteristics for each caption, as this has also been shown to increase scoring reliability (Garman, 2002). There should also be room on
the sheet for written feedback for each caption. Each caption would allow for a score of between 0-10, providing a 0-150 total score when both judges scores are combined.

**Feedback/Critique** – It is recommended that each judge be provided with an electronic recording device and hands-free microphone to record feedback and critique throughout the performance. Each ensemble will provide a usb thumb drive to adjudicators that these recordings will be uploaded to and then returned to directors at the completion of the festival. There should be room for written feedback on the judges scoring sheet but these digital recordings would be the primary means by which judges can provide feedback for participants.

**Other Judging considerations** – Ideally, the judges will be provided with a table in an acoustically advantageous location in the performance venue, with desktop lighting and a sectioned off area around them to avoid the judges’ discussions from being overheard by the audience or the audience members from distracting from the ability of the judges to observe the performance.

**Closing Statement:** This document is meant to be a jumping off point for a serious discussion on establishing a quality and sustainable festival experience for all string players throughout the state. At best, this would be a multi-year process involving a variety of stakeholders and be subject to a variety of recommendations and revisions coming from both practical experience and the additional input to be provided by the talented and dedicated string educators of the state. While the process may seem daunting, I believe it would ultimately provide greater benefit to the largest number of students when compared to the localized and privately run festivals currently being offered to our students.
While there are certain risks pertaining to promoting a competitive environment for young musicians, it is my opinion that student competition can be justified. In order to provide a safe adjudication process for students and teachers we must ensure that directors and organizers are focused on the goal of promoting achievement and student progress and not on scores or placement. By creating a positive festival experience, we may additionally create the added exposure needed to advocate for an increase to the status of string programs throughout the state. Thank you very much for taking the time to read this document and seriously consider how such a program is both possible and advantageous to string students and educators throughout the state.

Sincerely, Ian W. Miller

Orchestra Director, Thomas E Bowe School

President-Elect, South Jersey Band and Orchestra Directors Association

Member, All-State Orchestra Rules and Procedures Committee
References


