

Professional Growth Through PMEA Adjudication

One of the core goals of PMEA Adjudication is “to establish PMEA Music Performance Assessments as a must-do, priority event of choice each year for all directors throughout the state due to the significant educational benefits for participating students”.

As an NFL replay official often states, ‘upon further review’, it is clear that the words ‘and themselves’ need to be added to that statement.

Ensemble directors who participate in one of the available assessment contexts within PMEA Adjudication---Band, Orchestra, Chorus, Jazz Ensemble, Percussion Ensemble and Solo/Small Ensemble-----have a tremendous opportunity for meaningful professional growth.

Each of the three adjudicators is asked to identify areas of strength within the performance to reinforce what is indeed working, feedback that is meaningful in that it helps validate the director’s efforts, is certainly reassuring, and, realistically, helps the director be more open and receptive to suggestions. A balance between positive and critical comments must exist for the learning climate to be effective.

Obviously, the adjudicators are also asked to target areas of concern throughout the performance. Directors should welcome those comments as opportunities for learning for themselves as well as for their students. We urge any director with anxiety or trepidations of any kind to set aside those barriers. Instead, realize that this feedback is like no other in its relevance and potential for improvement.

The ‘play by play’ commentary on cassette tape from three adjudicators is particularly valuable for the director. While some observations about the performance at a given moment simply state the obvious----wrong notes, blown counting, or some kind of ‘oops’ ----others dig much deeper with insights about tone, technique and expression that are both relevant to that point in the music and transfer for future use.

The written comments on the new Assessment Forms address overall strengths and concerns along with suggestions for improvement. Adjudicators should be able to capture a holistic perspective of each ensemble in their wrap-up comments both on tape and in writing, including focused strategies

and direction for ‘the next steps’ for directors to take back and use right away.

And, the ratings themselves offer quantitative feedback in each of the five key assessment areas with a number and descriptors that provide a snapshot of that performance. The +/- column enables the adjudicators to provide additional holistic input on the significant criteria within each assessment area.

Both the feedback and the rating are absolutely critical to effective assessment---and meaningful professional growth for directors-----in this adjudication context.

Band and orchestra directors also benefit from the sight-reading component. The challenge can be exhilarating. Preparing for and experiencing sight-reading at adjudication develops individual and ensemble skills that are valuable in their own right and definitely transfer to any rehearsal and performance.

Don’t forget the powerful relevance of comments about the ‘art of conducting’ in real time. The adjudicators should be able to offer commentary that reinforces effective conducting and that offers suggestions for adjustments at a particular moment in the music-----opportunities for truly relevant growth in this area that can’t be found in an article or at a workshop. (As an aside, DO seek out conducting master classes as amazing opportunities to develop awareness and technique.)

Also, don’t overlook how a student’s performance in solo/small ensemble assessment can help the director. Comments by the adjudicator---a specialist on that instrument---should both reinforce what the director already knows about the overall musicianship of the student(s) involved and provide additional in-depth observations and improvement strategies.

I found my adjudication experiences as a high school band director to be among the most profound of my career in terms of focused, ‘real’ professional growth opportunities. The ‘artistic rush’ I experienced from participating is one I’ll always treasure, regardless of the range of ratings received. The hardest decision is the first ‘I’ll do it’; one I strongly assert that you will NOT regret!



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