

Hosting an MPA: The Many Options at All Levels that You Might Not Know are Available!

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Participation in PMEA's Music Performance Assessment program is steadily growing as more directors pursue the benefits of the assessment experience for their students and programs. However, the biggest obstacle to participation for many is not having a MPA site within reasonable driving distance. More hosts in all areas--band, orchestra, chorus, and solo & small ensemble--are needed throughout the state!

We strongly encourage directors to consider hosting even if they haven't previously participated in an MPA. Given that most directors have participated in or even hosted some kind of band, orchestra, or chorus festival, the current Guides to Hosting and availability to answer questions throughout the planning process provide hosts with the support needed for a successful MPA. With Solo & Small Ensemble MPA's updated last year for the first of those MPA's held since 2011, the structure is in place for directors to implement successfully as a host in 2024.

Unique to Pennsylvania is that hosts have considerable flexibility in determining the large ensemble setting that best reflects their interests and priorities in meeting the needs of the students involved. While the typical MPA where a mix of middle and high school bands and orchestras, or choruses from throughout the area convene at a given site for the performance assessment experience remains the most common, numerous other options are available:

- **'Internal' MPA's** where all the participating ensembles are from the host's school district, prioritizing the opportunity for ensembles from grades 6 (or younger) through middle and high school to participate. Ensembles can often watch the other ensembles perform to reinforce exposure to support recruiting, retention, and program cohesion. Adjudicator time can also be maximized for post-performance clinics.
- **'All-Festival' MPA's** where all ensembles participate in the 'Festival' performance context. Particularly attractive for directors and programs new to performance assessment, ensembles can simply perform music being prepared for spring concerts without concerns for grade levels or choosing from selective music lists. Bands and orchestras often choose a post-performance clinic from the adjudicators instead of sight-reading to receive additional focused feedback while eliminating the need to prepare for a sight-reading component.
- **'All Middle School MPA's** where all the participating ensembles include students from as young as grade 5 through even grade 9. The MPA could be 'internal' with all ensembles from within a given school district or be more typical by inviting other middle school ensembles from throughout the area. This also opens the opportunity for middle school and junior high directors to host. A common misconception is that MPA's are only for high school ensembles hosted by high school directors. High school directors can certainly help their colleagues with planning and provide high school student volunteers to assist throughout the event.
- **'All String Orchestra MPA'** where all the ensembles are middle and high school string orchestras from throughout the area. It could be easily structured as 'Festival', all 'Traditional', or a mix of the two. An additional benefit would be the opportunity to contract adjudicators all with strong orchestra backgrounds.
- **'All 6th Grade MPA'** where all the ensembles are sixth grade or a combination of fifth and sixth grade students from throughout the area as hosted by sixth grade directors. Adjudicators could be contracted who have significant experience at this level. Given that the Prepared Pieces are shorter in length, ample time remains for on-stage adjudicator clinics whether or not sight-reading is included.

Many of these options have already been suggested and successfully implemented by past hosts!

Similar options exist for Solo & Small Ensemble MPA's. With participation easily possible for interested students from elementary through high school, opportunities exist for directors from all levels to host.

A typical Solo & Small Ensemble MPA would be hosted by a high school director with students participating from throughout from the area. Hosts would decide the extent of the areas included: woodwinds, brass, percussion, strings,

and voice as well as the grade levels involved. Hosts are permitted to structure the extent of participation with parameters that best meets their needs, interests, and preferences.

Depending on school and program size, hosts may choose an 'Internal Solo & Small Ensemble MPA' for only participants from that district. Or, directors from ANY grade level may choose to host an 'All Middle School' or 'All Elementary School' (I.e. grades 4-6) MPA open to schools from throughout the area.

In addition to determining the overall setting as detailed above, hosts enjoy many benefits compared to participating at another site.

- **Choosing an MPA date** within the school year that best works for their ensembles and facilities
- **Not needing to travel** to participate minimizes time out of class and limits busing costs to ensembles from other buildings traveling to the building where the MPA would be held
- **Setting the schedule** to best accommodate intra-district travel or out of class restrictions involving ensembles from other buildings
- **Choosing the adjudicators** who they feel will best meet the needs of the participating ensembles
- **Receiving an honorarium** from PMEA paid to the host's school activity account, parent booster group or music department that may be applied to registration fees owed.
- **Being reimbursed for host expenses** by MPEA such as lunch and beverages for the adjudicators and hosting personnel. There are no significant expenses for hosts.

Above all, hosts can celebrate the intrinsic satisfaction that comes from contributing above and beyond to advance music education in PA through facilitating meaningful performance assessment opportunities and the resulting individual, ensemble, and program growth.

Potential hosts are urged to peruse the available "Guides to Hosting", forms and resources posted within the MPA area within the PMEA website. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or for further clarification at tsnyder@westasd.org.