
Program Planning and Measurement: deliberate sequential development

*Regardless of what
our version of success
is, we can all agree
that success is a
moving target that
requires regular
checkups and redirects
to stay on track.*

by Eric Smedsrud

It seems the path of most music teachers follows a very similar route. Most of us began our tenure in public school music as the sole center of our musical community. We were the governing body of all that employed musical artistry. We were the primary musical curriculum officer, program coordinator, trip adviser, parent booster recruiter, assessment specialist, fundraising guru, communication specialist and, of course, conductor of no less than a half-dozen performing ensembles—often with little to no experience in most, if not all, our assigned areas. We employed loosely sketched “plans” saturated with high levels of anticipation, enthusiasm and energy. Our plans were sure to revolutionize the education industry. We would be tearing down the walls obstructing student learning and single-handedly bridging the achievement gap. “OUR” students would surely achieve all the things that we were never adequately exposed to when we were in school. We had developed lesson plans to teach all 12 major scales and all 16th-note rhythmic permutations to our middle school bands by week 12. Our instruction model would inspire students to develop not only a deep technical facility but a long-lasting love for music making as well. Our students were destined to become ambassadors of the highest caliber for our new society of public school music students. I look back at the early days with a great deal of admiration. Our dreams/goals as music teachers are key components to the successes of our students. Now, however, I have a better understanding of the challenges associated with achieving these dreams and a greater appreciation for the master teacher who seems to be able to simply erase these limiting factors. How do they do what they do?

(continued on the next page)

The HOW and WHAT really are the critical questions for our work with our students and often serve as both the beginning and the end of our best intentions. Chasing an answer to these questions has led to many hundreds of hours of conversation with colleagues and mentors about what a successful music program even looks like. What defines the success of a program, and how do we create it? Is it a well-crafted musical performance at a prestigious music event? Is it a trophy...or even all the trophies? Is it a certain percentage of student-body participation? Is it attrition rates? Is success measured by the musical participation beyond grade 12? How do you recreate the success of the previous year? What made last year such a hit? What were the key components?

Of course, we all know that there is more than one version of what a successful program may look like. Factors such as teacher experience, program details/program size, student age group, geographic location, prior experience, etc.—all are critical factors for determining the appropriate measure for success of both the teacher and the programs they serve. One could argue that success is determined by our ability to provide meaningful experiences for the students we serve. Regardless of what our version of success is, we can all agree that success is a moving target that requires regular checkups and redirects to stay on track.

Creating a plan for student and program success has served as the primer for the approach discussed in the following article. This statement is simply intended to provide a glimpse into a structure that has helped us to track, maintain and recreate some of the “successes” we have had with our students. I hope you find the principles applicable to your environment. The approach outlined below focuses our efforts in three separate categories: Student Engagement, Group Achievement and Individual Achievement. Each category includes strategies for both tracking and modifying (interventions) program elements. While all three categories are critical to the success of the program, we have found the order of delivery to be the most important factor to consider. We will discuss most of the finer details of each category in the material that follows.

Student Engagement

Students initially choose to participate in our programs for a wide variety of reasons. Ultimately, we are tasked with creating a meaningful, joyful experience for every student. Evaluation within this category must be connected solely to student participation. Identifying, tracking and developing ways for students to participate in our programs is at the heart of student engagement. It is safe to assume that if students are choosing to participate in our programs, then students are enjoying their experience. While lack of participation can be for a number of reasons—scheduling, school transitions etc.—participation remains as the primary measurable factor at the time for this level of program development/measurement.

This process begins by taking inventory of the opportunities available to our students. What outlets exist for our students who love participating in chamber ensembles (select performance

groups like jazz band/chamber choir/chamber orchestra/wind ensemble), solo and ensemble, marching band, student leadership or still other musical outlets? The program inventory allows us to identify the strengths/weaknesses of our course/activity offerings and often leads to modifications to program offerings as well as the saturation or intensity of these key activities. Obviously, not all interests can be fully developed, but we can and should regularly reflect on the available offerings of our program to determine if we are meeting the needs of our students.

Tracking student participation is the next critical step. Begin by simply tracking participation in the areas identified in your program inventory. This includes tracking enrollment in curricular groups as well as volunteer opportunities like booster fund raising events/activities and volunteer performance ensembles, like caroling groups or community chamber performances. By recording this material, we are able to track participation from year to year and compare the results. Changes to the event calendar, community demographics, modifications to curricular emphasis (tests, practice records, sectionals etc.) and even modifications to the way we interact with students in the rehearsal setting can be indicated in our records and tracked to determine the impact of the modifications. Student surveys, student interviews, and conversations with students and parents may also be used to provide insight into the health and wellness of our program.

In the end, getting and keeping students involved is the single most critical component to program development. However, it is by no means the end of the road. While it is very exciting to “build” our programs, most of the elements present in the student engagement category are lacking direct ties to performance achievement. We need to celebrate the engagement of our program but must also continue to develop the center of the music program—group achievement.

Group Achievement

We’ve all experienced visiting a high school graduation and having the unfortunate pleasure of hearing *Pomp and Circumstance* performed over and over while 300+ high school seniors process at a never-ending pace. In that moment the pedigree of the performance ensemble is of no consequence. Every person in attendance is making full, unfair judgment of the ensemble, its students, the director and the school they represent. It doesn’t matter if the program has grown by 200% in the last three years. Or if the group recently performed at a Grand National event or even if the ensemble minus the graduating seniors is simply not as strong as it needs to be. The graduation performance represents the only performance most of the audience will ever hear. This is as true for ensembles at graduation as it is for the national anthem at home football or basketball games, jazz festival performances, student body pep assemblies, home concerts or even our regional concert ensemble festivals. Every performance matters and must be prepared with appropriate detail and care. This category focuses not only on the measurement of group achievement but also serves to identify specific areas in need of concentration to ultimately improve group achievement.

The tracking and interventions attached to this category are focused on the impact we as educators have on the performance quality of our student groups. Tracking this material requires a slightly different focus. While Student Engagement is measuring participation, retention and growth (student activity), the Group Achievement category is measuring the impact directors are having on the ensemble (director activity). We begin again by taking inventory of those areas that will be tracked as appropriate measurement tools for group achievement. Tracking festival performances and ratings, merit-based invitations and other special performance events are great indicators of ensemble achievement and also serve as a means to identify the number and type of peak performances attached to a given student group. Peak events provide indicators of the emphasis built into the program calendar and may be used to impact areas of concern discovered through the tracking process (more or fewer performances/peak events). Other non-rating-based items to track could include private lesson participation, program instrumentation, and number and type of student clinic events.

The interventions created in response to the tracking process can include any number of unique and innovative ideas. The first place to consider interventions is with our performance calendar and our peak performance events. Initiating peak events for each performance ensemble will provide student groups with a focal point and a vehicle for increased preparation in that area. Other interventions in this category may range from initiating private lesson programs, designing special student clinic events, developing an artist residency program or even perhaps simply adding additional rehearsals or retreat activities to increase contact time with a particular section or ensemble. Our role in this category is to provide a balanced effort to our program and design ways to remedy imbalances and weaknesses exposed through the tracking process.

The student engagement and group achievement categories are only two of three segments of a comprehensive music program. The third and final area is solely focused on the measurement and interventions of the individual achievement skills of our students. While each level is addressed simultaneously, the order of introduction and level of saturation must be carefully monitored and delivered for optimum student growth. Student enjoyment is as critical as ensemble quality and must be established before individual student achievement becomes important. Without steps 1 and 2, step 3 is meaningless.

Individual Achievement

It is our responsibility to provide resources that enable our students to develop as literate, functioning, independent musicians. We have all had the cold flash when a very nice, well-intentioned senior band student of average ability informs us that he/she is going to audition in three days to become a college music major. What elements exist within our curriculum that can help our students to determine if they are ready for this step? How do we communicate their strengths and weaknesses as individual

musicians? It is our responsibility to create an environment that will allow appropriate growth for each student at every level. This is as true for our future college music majors as it is for those interested in becoming community musicians who simply enjoy performing. How do we prepare them for this step?

This process begins again by creating an inventory of elements to measure. Regional solo and ensemble participation/ratings, private lesson participation, honor ensemble auditions and invitations, state solo and ensemble performances/ratings/placings: all are examples of items to be added to the tracking spreadsheet as indicators of individual achievement. As in earlier segments, interventions are created to address specific weaknesses exposed through the tracking process. Interventions may include increased recruitment for participation at regional solo and ensemble contests, the development of specific performance clinic events or even the creation and implementation of performance routines to develop individual technique within the full ensemble. Keep in mind that interventions are long-term projects that require significant time and deliberate repetition to net positive results.

As mentioned earlier, individual achievement is introduced as step three for very specific reasons. The quality of student experience takes precedence over all other aspects of program development. That is not to say that students must LIKE every exercise, assignment or task, but that the student connection to the program occupies the requisite attention and energy to ensure that the experience and personal sacrifices are meaningful and appropriately rewarding. While there is no silver bullet when it comes to program development, creating a sequential plan will net much greater results and direction than a series of chance encounters. The processes outlined above have helped to define my goals and enabled the design of meaningful events for our students. Stay on course. Set meaningful goals for yourself as well as for your program, and growth will follow. I hope this information can help you to better define your vision for developing your successful music program.

Eric Smedsrud, who is in his 16th year of teaching high school band, is co-director at Mountain View High School in Vancouver WA. His duties include co-director of the three Mountain View concert bands; director of the Mountain View String Orchestra, Jazz II, Percussion; and Mountain View Band Leadership team. He received his undergraduate degree in 1998 from the University of Idaho, a master's degree in trumpet performance from Washington State University in 2000 and earned his National Board Certification in 2008. Eric has served as president of the Columbia Basin and Lower Columbia River Music Educators Associations. He is active as an adjudicator and clinician, serving on panels for numerous concert, marching and jazz festivals across the Northwest region.



Now until April 15	Now until June 1
PROPOSE	AUDITION TO BRING
A SESSION	A GROUP TO PERFORM
for the 2016 WMEA Conference	for the 2016 WMEA Conference
Go to www.wmea.org	