Music Teacher Evaluation in Michigan: A Survey of Practices and Beliefs

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The current context

- Difficult to describe a coherent national picture because of state-level differences
- Trends include emphasis on student achievement/growth, value-added analysis, performance assessment based on standards/rubrics (Darling-Hammond, 2013)

New initiatives are “churning ahead at breakneck pace” and “the very metaphor of ‘Race to the Top’ seems to preclude careful deliberation” (Barrett, 2011, pp. 2-3).
The music education conversation?

- NAfME professional events, resources, position statements
- SMTE website, music education policy roundtable agenda
- State music education groups

But do these reflect practitioner beliefs?
What do we know about teachers’ beliefs?

- In general education:
  - Doherty (2009)
  - Breedlove (2011)

- In music education:
  - Taebel (1990)
  - Maranzano (2002) is most relevant

- But...
  - Many changes in intervening years
    - Only 8% of teachers in Maranzano’s study reported use of student achievement data in their evaluations
Purpose and Problems

Purpose statement: The purpose of this research was to investigate secondary instrumental music teacher evaluation.

Research problems were: (a) To describe the practices involved with evaluation of middle and high school band and orchestra teachers in Michigan, and (b) to describe the beliefs of middle and high school band and orchestra teachers in Michigan regarding music teacher evaluation.
Sample

- A link to the survey was sent to all MSBOA members (N=898) with an email address on file.
- The first emailed link elicited 216 responses over the period of one week, and a reminder email with a deadline notification elicited an additional 114 responses for a total sample of N=330 (response rate of 36.7%).
- Breakdown: 81.3% band, 18.7% orchestra
- Average years teaching: 15.9
Survey Instrument

- Demographics questions (years teaching, teaching responsibilities, certification)

- 4-point Likert-type questions; some options for “other” (these were required)

- Open-ended response questions (these were optional)
Results: Evaluation Practices

- How many times are you observed?
- Who is primary evaluator?
- Scheduling? Meetings? Goal setting?
- Assessments used to demonstrate student growth?
- Model/framework?
- Most common comments?
“You do a great job with the kids.”

“Professional, caring, dedicated.”

“What is that little gadget you use to check the notes?”

“I don't understand what you did ... but I think you did a good job.”

“Write a more detailed agenda on the board.”

“You need to be able to quantify student improvement”

“What are you doing to show growth of learning in the student?”
Results: Beliefs

Who?

What?

Etc.
Music teachers cannot be fairly evaluated using generic tools?
Administrators are qualified to evaluate music teachers?
Evaluated by selected music professionals (in person)?

![Bar Chart]

- ** Agree: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
- ** Disagree: Only Agree

Legend:
- Blue: Strongly Disagree
- Brown: Disagree
- Green: Strongly Agree
- Red: Agree
Evaluated by selected music professionals via videotape?
By teachers within same specialized area?
By music teacher outside specialized area?
By music education professor?

![Bar chart showing agreement and disagreement responses. The chart indicates a majority of respondents agree with the statement, with a smaller number strongly disagreeing.]
Use checklists of observable behaviors?

- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
Use MSBOA festival ratings as part of evaluation?
“Can a school with students who dream of having a meal tonight be compared to schools with students who dream of careers and success?”

“The scores and standard level can vary widely from site to site”

“Children can be taught to play by rote. That is no different than 'teaching to the test.'”

“I would program much easier if my evaluation were tied to a rating at festival.”

“Adjudicated by band directors who do not have the needed experienced with orchestras”

“The rubric is very open to adjudicator opinion.”
“Ratings should be available as one criterion in student growth or teacher evaluation, but a menu of items from which the local team (evaluator and teacher) can pick would be most useful.”

“I think festival performance should be considered with the idea that first and second division are both acceptable.”

“Since what band directors do is teach a band to perform as an ensemble, it only makes sense to evaluate a director on how well his/her ensemble performs.”

“I initially was against this until my administration said that the ACT was going to be my standard. I have now offered up my scores as evidence of student growth.”
Fairness and Accuracy

“Yes, they are fair and accurate but the evaluators only give feedback on the things they understand—organization, discipline, etc.”

“No...my principal has not actually come into my classroom to observe me since my 1st year of teaching.”
Helped you to improve?

- “Yes. I have included new ideas this year that I gained from my evaluation last year.”
- “Yes. They force me to focus more intently on improving my teaching skills.”
- “No. My administrators have told me they don’t know anything about band.”
- “No. I am given little or no advice for how to improve.”
Manipulation/Cheating?

“People want to get a positive rating and keep their job. Sometimes people do desperate things.”

“ Anything is possible with the stress and lack of teacher support.”

“No. I believe we have more integrity than that.”

“No, because a musical performance speaks for itself in relation to a standard of excellence.”
Negatively affect you?

- “No. I am confident in my teaching ability and take constructive criticism well...I have nothing to fear.”
- “Not any more. They did when I was a younger teacher.”
- “Yes, it is something completely out of my control that I don’t understand that could make me lose my job—that’s pretty scary.”
- “Yes they do! They make me nervous, make me lose sleep, and really scare me.”
Results: Beliefs

- Final open-ended question: Anything else to share?
- Themes:
  - Individual vs. group
Individual vs. group

“I believe that group evaluation is not an effective way to measure student growth.”

VERSUS...

“I think it is important that group performance be the primary means for evaluation. Otherwise, we will no longer be teaching performing ensembles as our primary focus.”
Results: Beliefs

- Final open-ended question: Anything else to share?
- Themes:
  - Individual vs. group
  - Performance vs. comprehensive
Performance vs. comprehensive

“We are music educators first, band and orchestra directors second. Evaluations should focus more on student learning...than the sound of our performance ensembles.”

VERSUS...

“Administrators should attend rehearsals early in the process and then attend the concerts. That shows student progress.”
Results: Beliefs

- Final open-ended question: Anything else to share?
- Themes:
  - Individual vs. group
  - Performance vs. comprehensive
  - Desire for meaningful evaluation
Desire for meaningful evaluation

“I think that having high-quality evaluations is important and good, but we might as well not waste our time with these slap-dash assessments.”

AND...

“Evaluations need to be clear, effective, and should be an open dialogue between teacher and evaluator.”
Results: Beliefs

- Final open-ended question: Anything else to share?
- Themes:
  - Individual vs. group
  - Performance vs. comprehensive
  - Desire for meaningful evaluation
  - Evaluation by a musician
Evaluation by a Musician

“It has to be done by someone with music experience to be fair and effective.”

AND...

“We need to be evaluated by MUSIC EDUCATORS that know what we are doing and challenges we face.”
Results: Beliefs

- Final open-ended question: Anything else to share?
- Themes:
  - Individual vs. group
  - Performance vs. comprehensive
  - Desire for meaningful evaluation
  - Evaluation by a musician
  - Local/narrowly-tailored approach
Narrowly-Tailored Approach

“No single system could fit all districts in Michigan. My needs at a Class A high school ... are FAR DIFFERENT than a teacher at a Class D school.”

AND...

“I believe it is best for music teachers to work with their school administration to develop an evaluation system that works for their student population, program size, goals, etc.”
Variability in practices will likely be standardized somewhat, whether wanted or not

Music teachers struggle to participate in meaningful evaluation practices

General sense of confusion, some fear/mistrust related to job security

Divides in profession about curricular focus and individual/group focus

Replications are needed
So are policy-makers listening to music teachers?
Do music teachers have a seat at the policy-making table?
Yes and no

Must limit observation-based teacher evaluations to those conducted by individuals with adequate training in music as well as in evaluation (NAfME, 2011).

When possible, at least one of a teacher’s multiple observations should be completed by someone who has expertise in the subject matter/grade level or the specialized responsibility of the teacher (MCEE, 2013).

Grade: Pass
Yes and no

Must be based on student achievement that is **directly attributable** to the individual teacher, in the subject area taught by that teacher (NAfME, 2011).

State-provided VAM or growth data in core content areas may be used in a teacher’s evaluation ... This means that teachers may be evaluated, in part, for the learning of their own students, even in subject areas that they do not directly teach ... (MCEE, 2013).

Grade: Fail
Encouraging signs?

- The Partnership for Music Education Policy Development (PMEPD) given time at MCEE meetings
- Music educators involved in designing model assessments in the arts (Michigan Arts Education Instruction and Assessment project)
- But compared to other states?
“If there is an irreducible truth of teacher evaluation, it is: Teacher evaluation will be no more effective than the extent to which teachers support it” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 404).
Thank You!

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