

Rehearsal Characteristics of Superior Band Directors By Keith Powers

Music has to sound great.

We're certain that nobody was really waiting around to hear that. But according to Jay Juchniewicz, whose led an extensive research study into the best practices of superior band directors, striving for superior tone quality was the most consistent goal.

"We expected band directors to talk about music fundamentals and tone production," Juchniewicz says, "but not this prominently. They were eager to talk, and there were a lot of miscellaneous comments. But so many mentioned that insisting on the best tone quality was what everyone should be focused on. It was overwhelmingly the main takeaway."

The study, published in *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* in May 2014 (<http://upd.sagepub.com/content/32/2/35.abstract>), was pursued by Juchniewicz, associate professor in music education at East Carolina University, and his colleagues Steven N. Kelly from Florida State University and Amy I. Acklin from the University of Louisville. They received responses from 131 middle and high school band directors across the southeast.

"Superior" band directors were chosen from those who had received expert or exemplary ratings over the past five years at concert festivals or through Music Performance Adjudications. It was the consistency of excellence that Juchniewicz and his research partners used to select participants.

"It was difficult figuring out who the best were," he says. "There is always some level of subjectivity. But once we did, relying on sustained success and longevity, it wasn't hard to get them talking. We told them to tell us in their own words, so that we wouldn't bias them toward any specific ideas." In all, they received almost 800 different responses from the participants. "The number of aspects that contribute to successful rehearsals also surprised me," Juchniewicz says. "Selecting the right literature. Choosing appropriate warm-ups. Classroom environment. Good student relationships. But, as one band director put it, 'If your band doesn't sound good, nothing else matters.' That really sums up the study."

No follow-up research is in the works right now, but with the study limited to band directors from Florida, Kentucky and North Carolina, "if we expand it someday, I might like to reach out across the country, even across the world, to find out what other band directors are thinking," Juchniewicz says.

"I spend plenty of time in my own methods courses developing pacing, dealing with students' feedback and personal characteristics," he says. "But I know now with my own band that if you're not making individual students play with better tone, you're not going to improve your band."

ALL IN

The idea of "superior music directors" strikes a chord with the National Association for Music Educators—so much so that NAFME has established ALL IN, a set of initiatives to help music educators become virtuoso teachers.

ALL IN (visit www.nafme.org/programs/all-in), in conjunction with the Solutions Music Group, has created a set of tools for evaluations, fundraising and advocacy, and is developing a series of meetings and webinars, aimed at helping the best music educators foster life-long lovers of music.

The mantra for ALL IN: The key to success is you. Developing great music teachers into great advocates, great fundraisers, and great colleagues is its goal.

Inspired by teachers who create marching bands in schools that don't even have a football team, or music directors who reach out to the whole community to build their programs, ALL IN wants to help every educator develop music lovers for life.