

## **National EI Sistema Study: Music Performance Measure**

### **Overview**

The National Study Music Performance Measure is outlined below. It may certainly be adapted to fit the needs of an individual site, but is presented here as it was used by the sites participating in the National Study.

The measure is designed to paint a portrait of each individual student's musical growth over time, and therefore it is administered to each student individually. It is also designed to assess growth directly on the instrument that the child studies (rather than by using recorded pieces or vocal demonstrations, for example). The measure can provide the foundation for starting an individual jury process at a program or it can be used to inform a program's own ongoing jury assessment that may already be in place.

- One of the questions that we frequently discussed throughout the study was whether it was fair to assess students through individual playing measures when, in their music programs, they almost always play in an ensemble. While this is a question worthy of discussion, it is important to note that an ensemble depends upon each individual musician growing and contributing – and upon teachers knowing and addressing how their students are progressing.
- As the details that follow will explain, the measure consists of two excerpts: one that represents a stage of early learning and one that represents well-rehearsed playing. These two excerpts span the instructional range of each student and allow teachers to assess musical learning more authentically.
- Because the measure assesses growth over time, it is important to administer at least two times. Ideally it would occur early in the first semester of the year (fall) and once again late in the spring semester of the year (spring) – with the student playing the same excerpts in fall and spring. However, it is also possible to administer a version of the measure each fall or each spring, for example, over a span of years.
- During the National Study we carefully controlled for Inter-Rater Reliability (IRR) among all raters across all sites involved. When administering this measure at your site, while calculating a mathematical IRR rating is not necessary, it is important to achieve an agreement about the rubric among the faculty who will serve as raters. For example, one rater may interpret a “pitch error” as an “intonation error” – which skews the overall results if there is disagreement among raters. It is recommended that raters come together to discuss a common approach to the rubric. This almost always produces a rich conversation that builds understanding and purpose among a faculty and contributes greatly to their professional development.

## Selecting, Preparing and Organizing Excerpts

Two excerpts are played by each student. Together the two performances suggest a student's current range of playing: from beginning to well-practiced. Looked at across players this information can inform where to "dig in" during lessons and sectional rehearsals.

- **Each student will play 8-12 measures of a leveled repertoire piece from the Royal Conservatory of Music Development Program.** These pieces have been chosen by an international team of music educators for assessment purposes. A set of excerpts in standard notation are written specifically for each instrument and are available at different levels of proficiency. While not sight-reading, this excerpt provides an assessment of how a student plays at a very early phase of learning music. It also provides a common yardstick used by your program and others.
- **Each student will also play 8-12 measures of a piece that they are currently working on in their program.** This excerpt may be determined by program teachers and may come from an orchestral part that they are playing in their program ensemble. It should represent a piece that the student plays proficiently and confidently. This excerpt assesses a student at a more mature and refined level.

Organizing for the measure:

- Copies of the Royal Conservatory excerpt must be downloaded and copied for each student and for the raters ahead of time. Copies or scores of the program excerpt must also be available for the raters.
- The Royal Conservatory excerpts are organized by instrument and by the length of time a student has been playing (rather than by age or grade.) For example, students playing for less than one year would use the "Preparatory Level," students who have been playing for one year would use "Level One," etc. .
- Students should receive the Royal Conservatory excerpt ahead of time from their instrumental teachers. Students should have a chance to play through the excerpt in a 20-minute rehearsal session before they play for the evaluators. **This rehearsal should occur not more than two weeks before the day of the performance measure.**

## Explaining the Process to Students/Rehearsing the RCM Excerpt

So as not to make any part of the performance measure an exercise in sight reading, all students should have one rehearsal on the RCM excerpt – using whatever teaching strategies are common at your site. Students may ask questions about any aspect of the piece and go over it with colleagues and teachers. But it is important to standardize the amount of time spent so that some students do not have more rehearsal time than others: 20 minutes is recommended.

Teachers should explain the process to students at the beginning of the year (the rehearsal of RCM excerpt is a good time). Here is some suggested language:

*“Here at (name of program) we listen to you playing all the time in rehearsals and concerts and we are always figuring out how our playing could get better. This year we also want to listen to you playing on your own to see how you and other students are growing as musicians. We are going to listen to you once in the fall and again in the spring to see how you’ve changed. You will play two very short pieces – one that is new to you and one that you know well. It’s not a test, it is a way to think about how musicians grow and get better. (You can offer some other examples: height measured on kitchen wall, different levels in judo/karate class, getting a bigger bike, levels in games) etc.*

## Establishing Reliable Judgements

It is highly recommended that all faculty who will serve as raters for the music performance measure come together as a group for a workshop prior to the administration of the measures. Details of logistics and procedure may be covered – and most importantly raters can establish a common understanding of how they will use the rubric. As a rule of thumb, reliability is gauged at 70%; this ensures that consistent, reliable judgements are being made.

After this workshop, videos of students playing several of the excerpts is a good way to ground your collective understanding in practice. Using a few short student videos will also allow you to collect rating sheets and calculate your reliability to make sure you are in the 70% zone.

Once the raters have completed these steps, they are ready to conduct the measures for the year.

## Conducting the Individual Sessions

The Music Performance Measure should be conducted in individual sessions, where each student plays for a team of two teacher-raters who have trained to be reliably consistent in their judgments. If at all possible, neither of the two raters should be the primary teacher of the student playing. If this arrangement is

impossible due to logistics or scheduling, please make sure the rater who is **not** the primary teacher takes the lead in directing the session, while the primary teacher plays the role of listener and supporter.

The speaking rater can remind the student of the purpose, stressing growth (see suggested language above). The tone can be warm and friendly, while at the same time refraining from either overtly positive language (eg: “great job”) or overtly corrective language or facial indications (eg: A twisted face if something is played out of tune, or “next time let’s think more about that bow hand position”).

The individual child plays the excerpts in this order:

- The excerpt from his/her own repertoire to warm up
- The repertoire excerpt from the RCM once “*to remember it*”
- The RCM excerpt again “*as if you were playing it in a performance/recital*”

### Scoring the Performance

Both excerpts should be scored using the rubric first adapted from NAFME (National Association for Music Education) and then considerably revised from work done in the National Study.

Even though raters may know the student and her/his playing – they should remember to rate THIS performance rather how they know the student usually plays, or should be playing. This is sometimes more difficult to do than we might imagine, given that our educator instincts are so very strong.

In the case of the RCM excerpt, students should be evaluated on the second time through the piece – not the first.

### Using the Reflective Questions

Several sites in the National Study piloted the reflective questions following the performance measures. These questions were designed to engage students in thinking about their musicianship. Sites that used the questions gleaned meaningful information from students’ own self-assessment. There is a section at the end of the score sheet in which to record student responses.

### Materials Needed for the Music Performance Measure

#### Students need:

- Music for both of the excerpts they will play

#### Evaluators need:

- 1 Copy of the outline that follows

- 1 Copy of the rubric
- Multiple copies of the Rating Sheet (1 for each student they will hear)
- Copies of the music that each student will play – it is important not to be hovering over the shoulder of the student watching her/his music

## Step-by-step instructions

### 1) Introductory Rehearsal Session

Teachers hand out the leveled RCM excerpt to children in a sectional rehearsal. Teachers may use any teaching strategies currently employed at their site to help students learn the piece in a 20-minute time frame. Ideally, all the students in the 20-minute rehearsal are working on the same piece (many sites gave feedback that this maximizes the learning in the short amount of time allotted).

The teacher explains the following, **feeling free to use her/his own words:**

*You will be playing this short excerpt on your own in about (insert time frame or date here.) You will be helping us as teachers/orchestra directors think about what you can already play and where we need to do more learning and practicing. It isn't a test. It is a chance to listen and think about how we are learning music.*

*We will have a chance to do this again at the end of the year to see how much progress we're all making. It is a chance to show off your best and try a new kind of music challenge.*

The teacher then helps the children to play the piece through and answers any questions.

The teacher should also help the student decide which excerpt from their current repertoire they should play for the measure. Like the required excerpt – it should be 8-12 measures of a piece they are currently working on and feel comfortable with. In the case of very new beginners who have only had the instrument for weeks or even days, the teacher should help them select something to play such as a series of open string notes or a scale – or demonstrating two notes on the instrument that they have already learned to play. (See the preparatory pieces as a guideline.)

**NOTE: The rehearsal session should happen no more than 2 weeks before the actual assessment day, but within that 2-week time frame – it can occur at any point.** (i.e. It can occur one week before, or two days before, etc.)

## **2) Administering the Music Performance Measure**

### **GREETING:**

The rater with whom the student is less familiar should conduct the session, doing most of the speaking.

Introduce yourself and the other evaluator in the room and let the student know you'll both be taking some notes. Make sure you know the student's name and double check how many years the student has been playing with the program. Invite the student to sit down.

The tone should be friendly, warm and supportive without any indication of judgment, either in a positive or negative direction.

### **PLAYING SESSION:**

Check in to see if the student would rather play sitting or standing (either is fine). Make sure she/he has the correct music.

Check to see that the stand is set.

Check to see if the student needs any help with instrument set up (tuning, shoulder rest attached, reeds all set, etc.) It is fine to help the student get set up in any necessary way

Points to be made:

1. *We're first going to hear an excerpt from a piece that you are already working on and comfortable with. This will help you get warmed up. Which piece are you going to play?*

***Student plays excerpt from current repertoire. Evaluators use rubric and rating sheet to score.***

2. *Thank you. Now we're going to take a look at this piece of music (TITLE) you began practicing in your rehearsal. (RCM excerpt)*
3. *We will play it two times. The first time is to remember how it goes – like a rehearsal. The second time will be like a performance -- like when you are playing in a concert.*
4. *This is the rehearsal - look at it and play through so your remember it. It is fine if you make mistakes, that is part of rehearsing. Would you like to start yourself, or would you like me to count you off?*

NOTE: STUDENTS HAVE A MAXIMUM TIME of 2 MINUTES for the REHEARSAL TO USE AS THEY SEE FIT. This may include starting over. If the

student is not inclined to rehearse, the evaluator should encourage them to do so, **but should not coach them in rehearsing the piece.** If the student says they are ready before 2 minutes have elapsed, continue to the next step.

**Student rehearses required excerpt.**

5. *Okay – that was your rehearsal – now we are going to play it like a performance. Once you start, if you make a mistake, it's really important to keep going through the whole piece. Would you like a count off this time?*

**Student plays required excerpt.**

**CLOSING**

It is fine to use your own words to thank the student and remind them that he/she will have another chance to perform (in the spring/next year). A final word of thanks, encouragement, or expression of pride, such as:

*Thank you so much for playing. We'll do this again. And we want you to know that everyone involved in this project and all of your teachers here at PROGRAM NAME are really proud of how much you are learning about music.*

**OPTIONAL REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:**

1. What did you notice about your playing?
2. What's one thing you think you will work on before we hear it again?