

## National Research Project for El Sistema-inspired Orchestras

### April Newsletter



#### Key Topics:

- A huge thanks
- Next steps
- Early Returns: Insights from the Pre-piloting Phase

### Greetings in Spring 2015

This is the fourth newsletter from the research team at Longy School of Music of Bard College and WolfBrown. The newsletter was originally designed to keep us all in touch and on track –with as few as possible separate emails. But with this newsletter we have a new purpose as well: acknowledging, sharing, and celebrating the insights from our shared work. So this is one huge:

## THANKS TO ALL OF YOU WHO HELPED TO PILOT AND REFINE OUR MEASURES

With your help we have now developed a robust set of field-tested, cross-site measures for capturing the work occurring at El Sistema-inspired sites.

### Milestones: Recent Accomplishments in the Study

- 1) **The Pre-pilot Work:** Throughout the Fall and Winter of 2014 -5, the sites in this study tried out a set of draft measures ranging from surveys of youth development to music performance measures. In addition, staff and teaching artists shared their critiques and suggestions in ways that have led to shorter and more focused surveys and music measures that now combine both familiar orchestra repertoire and new cross-site excerpts.
- 2) **Dropbox Update:** Our new measures and support materials (like proctor instructions, repertoire, etc.) are now posted in our shared Dropbox (“National El Sistema Evaluation Study” to which you all have access.) Please take the time to read all the materials and note all the changes. There are two folders that contain the new measures, one titled “Revised Measure Booklets and Proctor Instructions” that has both booklet measures, and the other titled “Music Performance Measures” that includes instructions and an additional folder with all the repertoire for all the instruments. Note, for example, we are now hearing 8 measures of the repertoire pieces you tried in the pre-pilot, and 8 measures of any piece that students are currently working on in their rehearsals. Please contact us with any questions or issues around access to these materials.

### Coming Right Up: Next Steps in the Study

1. Review the new materials in the Dropbox.
2. Develop your site plans for the pilot data collection in May from a larger number of students than you worked with in the pre-pilot phase of collection (the more, the better).
3. Consider how the music performance measures can fold into the year-end juries that you may already conduct
4. If it is helpful, make an appointment with one or several of us to walk through your plans and answer any questions you may have.
5. Since you will be collecting information from more students, you may want to think through who could support your efforts. See the story below from KidzNotes to spark your thinking.
6. We would like to receive your data by June 1, using the same Dropbox system you used in the piloting phase.

### Early Returns: Two questions arise for all of us in doing the work of this study:

- 1) Will pushing on common quantitative measures keep us from acknowledging the soul and variety of the work?
- 2) How soon will we see results?

From here on out, in each newsletter, we want to address these important questions – with your help. For this April edition we gathered a crop of early insights from sites that joined us in doing the pre-piloting work. Here is what we harvested:

- At **Conservatory Lab Charter School** in Boston, Keuna Cho worked with Judy Bose to create the training videos for the Music Performance Measure. In that process, we noticed all that it takes to play an excerpt. Students showed us who they were as young musicians-in-the-making. And in so doing, they reminded us about all that entails: musical skills like intonation and rhythm, coupled with position and focus. But even these very young players (2<sup>nd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> graders) revealed the role of self-efficacy for performers. Some of them asked forthright questions to be sure they were understood and standing up for what they needed in the moment (e.g., the ability to start again or the need for a chin rest adjustment.) We realized that when we are attentive observers and evaluators, it is a chance for our children to reveal themselves to us and to teach us all that is involved – and all that belongs in our curriculum. (For a thought-provoking example, check out Sarah in the Vimeo Music Performance Videos!)
- **iCAN** (Incredible Children's Art Network), Santa Barbara, CA learned a tremendous amount about working with their School District. Part of the iCAN process included a rigorous vetting of research procedures and a submission through the District's revision of policies about research. Says Xochitl Tafoya, "the entire process taught us to challenge our assumptions around the partnership and understandings we have with the District. As a result, we now have a much clearer relationship with them and a very extensive MOU that outlines research policies for iCAN. It will serve us not only in this particular project - but into the future as well."
- **Josiah Quincy Orchestra Program** in Boston serves many families of Chinese descent. Says Graciela Briceno, "Before research even started, we learned something important about our program operations. As we reviewed orchestra registration forms to generate the study and

control groups, we realized that there were many more forms filled out in Mandarin for the students on our wait list than there were for students registered in the orchestra program. This signaled to us that even though we translate all flyers and application forms into Mandarin, families whose primary language is Mandarin are still not able to register their children for the orchestra program as easily as families whose primary language is English or Spanish. This begs the question - how can we better communicate with our Mandarin-speaking families and ensure that they have equal opportunity to register for the orchestra program?"

- At **KidszNotes** in Raleigh-Durham, NC, necessity proved the mother of invention. Faced with the double-barreled challenges of running a music program and contributing to the national evaluation, KidZNotes staff came up with a brilliant two-for-one strategy. They enlisted a potential new board member, with extensive experience in educational psychology, to proctor the sessions where students completed their booklets of survey measures. The result has been a double dose of returns. The proctor offered extremely valuable suggestions about the lay-out and administration of the measures. At the same time, the prospective board member was able to engage more directly with KidZNotes students and learn more about the program. We owe the cleaner, clearer look of our booklets to this inspired partnership. In fact, we hope that this example will help other sites to think in similar "times two" ways.
- In Chicago, at **YOURS**, the youth orchestra supported by People's Music School, teaching artist Felipe Tobar watched the performance measure training videos and tried the measure with his string students at the Hibbard School in Chicago. He was struck by how much it taught him about the students' musicianship to see them learn a new piece quickly and play it. "I was completely impressed by how well they played and how enthusiastic they were to be a part of this project. They really took on the challenge and it taught me a lot about what my students are capable of," said Felipe.

### Any Questions?

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