

Dear Directors,

Over the last few years, we have had an increasing amount of feedback encouraging us to look at the organization of our festivals, particularly imploring us to consider the addition of ninth graders in the Junior Festival. CD-MMEA has long held a tradition of a true Junior High model, hosting seventh and eighth graders annually. This particular request was coming from a variety of sources. Several judges, past Festival conductors, and a number of directors (both middle and high school) had asked us to take another look at the structure of our ensembles. As such, these were suggestions that we heard with an open mind, but were not ready to move to without some serious consideration, and of course, feedback from all of you.

We sent out a survey explaining why we were considering this change, and looking for your thoughts. Personally, I was overwhelmed not only by the number directors who took the time to reply, but by the clear thoughtfulness that so many of you put into your responses. The comments were long, well considered, and many recognized what a difficult decision this is. We recognize that by including some ninth graders, there will be some seventh and eighth graders who will not be accepted. Our goal is never to create less of an experience, but there simply is no perfect solution. Many of you yourselves wrote about how conflicted you were about the decision. Several directors felt that their ninth graders wouldn't want to audition for or participate in a Junior Festival, yet one director commented that he asked his students and was surprised to hear that they were interested in auditioning, changing his opinion. The feedback, however, was overwhelmingly in favor of including ninth graders in the Junior Festival.

Out of 74 respondents, 56 (76%) said that their first choice was to expand the festival to include ninth graders. That number went up to 63 (85%) when looking at those who had it as their first or second choice. Only 13 (18%) wanted to keep the festival the same as their first choice in the survey. I believe that what was most surprising to the board was that the percentages were not largely skewed to one level or another. 60% of teachers who reported teaching 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders (but not 9<sup>th</sup> graders) wanted to include 9<sup>th</sup> graders. I, and I think a number of others on the board expected that number to be rather low among middle school teachers. Of those who taught both middle and high school students, 79% of the directors voted to expand the festival as their first choice, and 76% of those who taught only high school students voted to expand it as their first choice.

We are working over the course of this year to provide clear guidelines for participation, review audition literature, and anticipate logistical issues and questions. Our target date to launch this change is the 2020-2021 school year. This change is not something that will happen once and never be revisited. We are committed to continuing to look at this over the next several years to make changes when needed. If this becomes a change that is collectively found to not be in the best interest of students, we are open to reversing the change or finding a more suitable solution. The students are always who we consider first in such decision making.

Please realize that this means for this current school year (2019-2020), there is **NO CHANGE**. For the 2020-2021 we intend to begin a three year pilot of the addition of 9<sup>th</sup> grade to the Junior Festival. Throughout that year and the following year (2021-2022), we will be soliciting feedback from adjudicators and directors regarding the change. If we need to make slight adjustments throughout the process we will, and will make a decision following the 2022-2023 festival as to whether this becomes a long-term change, or if we need to reconsider the decision.

If you have questions about the process, survey results, or considerations about the process this year, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

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