

Defining Student Success in the Instrumental Music Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze how students define their own success in the instrumental music classroom. In this study, students from seven Lycoming County, Pennsylvania schools completed a survey exploring the various factors and influences that helped to determine their individual definitions of success. Students also participated in small focus group discussions, further examining when they have felt successful and how they define success. Survey and focus group data was compiled and analyzed to determine the most influential factors for students when defining personal success in the instrumental music classroom. Based upon the analysis of survey and focus group data, the study's findings suggest that students more frequently express that they experience success while performing in an ensemble than when performing alone. However, the study also found that it is easier for students to recognize and feel successful from improvement in individual performance than by improvement of the overall performance quality of an ensemble. Furthermore, the findings of this study illuminate that all students have unique and individualized definitions of success that are derived from their vast individual life experiences, both inside and outside of the music classroom. After drawing conclusions, the study provides practical classroom applications of the findings and potential suggestions for further research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze how students define success in the instrumental music classroom. In this study, students were surveyed to explore the various factors and influences that determine their individual definitions of success. Students also participated in small focus group discussions, further examining when they have felt successful and how they define success. Survey and focus group data was compiled and analyzed to determine the most influential factors for students when defining personal success in the instrumental music classroom.

Rationale

One of the many purposes of education is to ensure success for future generations. Every day, students attend school with the hope of acquiring skills and knowledge that will prepare them to successfully contribute to society. Even though it is often the desired outcome of education, success is an abstract concept that lacks universal definition. Defining success in education requires an understanding of unique and complicated perspectives. Frequently in today's educational climate, teachers and students within the same classroom express different ideas of what it means to be successful. Despite the challenges of creating a unified definition of success, teachers must attempt to understand success from the student's perspective.

As in all of education, the task of defining success in the instrumental music classroom is of critical importance as it provides a variety of unique benefits. Fostering a culture of student success may lead to higher student self-worth, greater student recruitment and retention, and increased program value in the community. However, in order to design instruction to student success, teachers must first understand the student's individual interpretation and definition of

success. This research study intends to assist the music education community in the goal of realizing student perceptions of success.

The purpose of this research study was to investigate and analyze how students define success in the instrumental music classroom. In the Winter of 2018-19, instrumental music students from various school districts in Lycoming County completed a survey regarding experiencing and defining success in an instrumental music setting. To gain further affective data, students from each district participated in small focus group discussions to further investigate when they have felt successful and how they define success. Upon completion of the survey and discussion groups, data was compiled and analyzed for themes and patterns. After a thorough analysis of the data, any conclusions regarding the prominent influences and factors in student definitions of success were shared in the conclusions and discussion with the music education community for the benefit of the profession.

Expected Findings

The online survey and focus group discussion were used to collect data on the various ways in which students experience success in the instrumental music classroom, and how they develop their personal definition of success. I expected to have a mixed variety of results concerning students' experiences with success. I believed that some students would focus on their academic course grade, while others may focus on their own sense of performance ability or extrinsic factors, like ratings or evaluations. I anticipated that more students would focus on the success of the ensemble, rather than their individual playing. I believed that in the traditional instrumental ensemble setting, there would be an emphasis on group success rather than individual skill and ability. There are a variety of factors that may lead to students establishing their own definition of success. Due to the culture and communities involved in this study, I

believed that most students would express that they learned or created their definition of success from the thoughts and opinions of their parents. Upon completion of the study, I hoped to be able to use the conclusions drawn regarding student definitions of success to evaluate culture and climate goals within my own district and across Lycoming County. Furthermore, by addressing or altering our definition of success, we can improve the way our students think about their own learning and performing experiences within the instrumental music classroom.

Chapter 2: Attempting to Understand Success

We want our students to be successful. As humans, and more specifically as teachers, we have an understood responsibility to work towards helping our students achieve success in our classrooms. If the aforementioned statements are true, then who defines the success for which we aim? Is there a “golden standard” that must be achieved, or are teachers merely aiming for a target that they cannot see? Does each classroom have its own definition of success, or does the same logic apply to each individual student? For decades, researchers have aimed to best define success and answer questions regarding the validity and authenticity of the various existing models for success.

A clear and precise definition of success in the music classroom has long evaded researchers and practitioners alike. Rosemary Gillett-Kalam (2016) succinctly captures the struggle of this in her research by stating, “defining student success has remained both vague and ambiguous” (p. 10). Her research contests that a lack of clear and achievable goal setting prevents students and teachers from accomplishing meaningful work. Despite the difficulty of defining success, research shows that it is necessary for us to understand what it means to be successful. Theodore Chandler (1987) protests that, at its essence, understanding success in the middle school band classroom will lead students to a greater level of performance and understanding. His work also claims that if students understand the goals that are set for them, or that they set for themselves, they will achieve at a higher level and experience a greater sense of satisfaction (Chandler, Chiarella, & Auria, 1987).

Despite the growing need to understand success, research varies on what it truly means to be successful in the music classroom. In her research, Kathleen Lis Dean (2015) contributes that traditional student success is defined by the completion of a diploma or degree; not necessarily

the academic achievement, but the numbers, figures, and certificates that are meant to represent said achievement (Lis Dean, 2015). However, researchers have also presented findings and ideas to the contrary. In his 2010 research, Nick Zepke (2010) presents that students, teachers, and employers have moved to a more open acceptance of what it means to be successful. His research asserts that the 21st century has opened the door for a more meaningful discussion and development of skills and personality traits such as teamwork, self-esteem, wellness, and relationship building (Zepke & Leach, 2010). Similarly, an Australian post-secondary study conducted by Ryan Naylor (2017) offers that some educational institutions have moved towards a new understanding of success where developing personal traits, finding and exploring new experiences, and fostering a sense of belonging become as important as degree completion and academic achievement (Naylor, 2017). Although there are new trends in defining student success, there is still much debate regarding the most beneficial and effective definition for students.

As could be predicted, the aforementioned debate has influenced music education and music classrooms around the globe. The research of educator Howard Margolis (2004) suggests that all teachers must “stack the deck” for success in their classrooms, and that this cannot be done without a unified and transparent goal in mind (Margolis & McCabe, 2004). In traditional music classrooms, success is defined through quantifiable results, such as academic grades, contest scores, or ensemble ratings, according to the work of Chrissy Ricker (2016). In recent years, however, researchers such as Lisa Martin (2012) have shown that a contemporary approach to student success aims to develop students’ sense of self-efficacy (Martin, 2012). She and music educator and researcher Roy Legette (1998) agree that student success should aim to promote and develop self-efficacy. Interestingly enough, Legette also shares that the success that

teachers and students experience is a direct product of the self-efficacy that they will aim to promote (Legette, 2012). However, not all educators share the sentiment that success must be goal-oriented. Choral researcher Patrick Freer (2009) contests that success is not a goal, but is rather the end result of presenting highly-skilled students with highly-challenging experiences (Freer, 2009). The debate regarding defining student success among music educators has continued for decades, and will most likely continue on for the foreseeable future.

Despite the fact that educators have aimed to define student success for decades, little research has been conducted regarding student perceptions of their own success. A 1986 study by Edward Asmus (1986) showed that students in secondary music classrooms attributed their success to internal factors, such as talent or ability (Asmus, 1986). This research was confirmed by Roy Legette in 1998, and confirmed again by the same researcher in a more recent 2012 study. Furthermore, in a 1998 study conducted by Walter Vispoel (1998), when asked what factors led to their definition or feelings of success, students claimed that their family, peers, and teachers all played a primary role in the development of their definition of success (Vispoel, 1998). However, this research did not provide any insight into the content or make-up of the individual student's definition of success. Even more concerning, none of this research has attempted to ask students what they think of their own success, or how they perceive and define success in the music classroom. The collaborative research of music educators Jennifer Allen and Catherine Nichols (2017) summarizes these concerns, saying that in order to ensure student success, teachers must embrace student-centered approaches to learning that define students as partners in the construction of their own success. Their research offers that this type of a partnership would produce greater student achievement, as it affords students the opportunity to become further invested in their own success (Allen & Nichols, 2017). Without question, the

research above indicates a glaring need for further exploration and investigation into student definitions of success, providing the rationale and impetus for the beginning of this research study.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Results

Descriptive Design

This study investigated student definitions of success and the various factors that influence and contribute to a student's individual definition of success within the instrumental music classroom. The focus of this research was to discover and define the moments in which students experience success and the factors that determined this experience and definition of success. The research examined this focus through a two-faceted approach including both individual survey responses and focus group discussion. The participants consisted of current seventh through twelfth grade instrumental music students from seven school districts in Lycoming County, Pennsylvania.

Survey participants were selected based upon two primary factors: their experience in the high school music program, and their willingness and ability to complete the online survey. Survey links were distributed to all secondary schools in Lycoming County, with detailed instructions for the completion of the survey. The survey remained open to complete for one week. After one week of responses, the survey was closed and data was collected and analyzed. In total, 343 instrumental music students from eight secondary schools in seven Lycoming County school districts completed the online survey.

Focus group participants were then selected from the online survey respondent pool based upon similar factors: their willingness, availability, and interest to participate in a focus group discussion, and their ability to express their thoughts cohesively. Due to a large response in online survey participants, the researcher was able to be selective in choosing participants for focus group discussion. School music teacher or ensemble director recommendation was considered while selecting students to participate in focus group discussions. After careful

consideration and survey analysis, 23 students with experience in their respective instrumental music program, who were judged to be able to thoughtfully express their experiences, were selected to participate in the discussions.

The students selected to participate in the focus group discussion were divided into seven focus groups. The division of participants was based upon the home district of the student and the flexibility of scheduling the focus group discussions. Each focus group consisted of three to four students. The students in each focus group participated in a 30 to 45 minute group discussion following the established focus group protocol (see Appendix B). Student responses were recorded using audio-recording technology on a personally owned cellular phone, and the responses were then transcribed by the researcher.

Both the online survey and focus group discussion protocol were created independently by the researcher. Survey questions were created to gain comprehensive insight into the variety of instrumental music experiences of the individual, the moments in which they had experienced success, and their personal definition of success in music. The online survey questions were divided into five sections:

1. Instrumental Experiences: questions identifying the types of instrumental music experiences the student has encountered.
2. Experiencing Success: questions relating to their experience with success in the instrumental music classroom.
3. Defining Success: questions determining how students create and develop their personal definition of success.
4. Determining your Definition: questions assessing the various factors that may influence students during the process of defining success.

5. Demographics: questions pertaining to specific demographic information.

Online survey participants completed the questions in a predetermined order that remained consistent for all survey respondents (see Appendix A). Students were given no prior instruction except to answer all of the questions to the best of their ability. In all cases, student participants were allowed as much time as they felt necessary to complete the survey, and when all participants felt content with their completion, they were able to finalize and submit their responses. The survey respondents were then promptly thanked for their time and told that the results of this study would be made available to them upon their request. The survey data was collected into Google Forms and analyzed by the researcher.

The focus group discussion protocol and questions were also created to gain insight into the variety of instrumental music experiences of the individual, the moments in which they had experienced success, and their personal definition of success in music. However, unlike the online survey, the focus group additionally aimed to capture the qualitative and affective reasoning behind the responses recorded in previous sections. The focus group discussion questions were divided into the same five sections as the online survey. The discussion consisted of questions that were asked in a predetermined order that remained consistent between all focus groups. Students were given no prior instruction or coaching, and were allowed as much time as was deemed necessary to answer a question. When all participants appeared to be content with their participation in discussion regarding a specific question, the discussion moved to the next question in sequence. Upon completion of the interview protocol, the participants were asked if there was anything else they wished to share about their instrumental music experience and their own personal definition of success. The students were also thanked for their time and participation, and then told that the results of this study would be made available to them upon

their request. The interview data was punctually transcribed by the researcher, and then the audio recordings of the discussions were all permanently destroyed.

Pilot Study

In order to ensure an effective online survey and focus group discussion protocol, a pilot study was launched using the initial survey and discussion process. This survey and discussion protocol was launched the previous semester (Fall 2018) utilizing students in a separate Lycoming County school district. No students who participated in the pilot study participated in the final study. Student responses were recorded, assessed, and destroyed. The researcher analyzed the pilot study participants' responses to assess the accuracy of the survey and interview protocol. Several survey questions were altered as a result of this pilot study. The final online survey protocol can be found in Appendix A, and the final focus group discussion protocol located in Appendix B.

Analysis of Survey Data

After one week of collecting survey responses, the researcher closed the online survey. From this point, the researcher analyzed the survey data. This analysis was accomplished through data represented and compiled in Google Forms. Initially, each question was analyzed individually. After a first examination, the researcher then grouped students by various survey responses to attempt to find any potential causation or correlation. Analysis was conducted regarding the relationships between various student groups relating to home school district, ensemble adjudication or competition experience, age, gender, and primary instrument. After completing this group analysis, the researcher looked for the number of times any potential correlation or causation occurred in the online survey responses. This analysis was conducted for each of the questions asked in sections two, three, and four of the online survey protocol.

Analysis of Discussion Transcription Data

Upon completion of the focus group discussion transcriptions, the interview audio recordings were destroyed. From this point, analysis of the transcriptions was of great importance. This analysis was accomplished through a quantification of qualitative responses from the participants as follows: Each question was first analyzed individually. For each question, the researcher examined the individual responses of each participant to look for response themes. If similar answers were discovered, the responses were grouped together into one general statement that captured the essence of the participants' responses. For example, the responses "I have felt successful during my individual lesson with my band director" and "I enjoy my private lessons because they make me feel successful when I improve on my instrument" would be grouped together into a general response stating "Improvement in Individual Lessons". After a theme was established, the researcher looked for the number of times this response occurred in both the individual focus group discussion and throughout all focus group discussions. This analysis was conducted for each of the questions asked during interview protocol.

Example Table 1

Question #	Repeated Response Theme	Focus Group (7)	Individual (23)
3	Performing alone on my instrument	6	21

In this example, a response theme was found for focus group question number 3. The theme of the response was related to experiencing success while performing alone or individually on their instrument. This themed response was recorded in six out of seven focus groups and was indicated by 21 of 23 students involved in all of the focus group discussions. This method of data

collection was analyzed for all answers, unless the answer did not fit a theme, in which case “no response theme, varied individual answers” was indicated in the collection table.

Survey Data Results

After the online survey was closed to responses, the survey responses were recorded and analyzed using Google Forms. The entirety of the survey data, complete with analysis charts, is available in Appendix C. The following results were gathered from the completion of the online survey:

Section 1: Instrumental Experiences

Of the 343 students that completed the online survey, only 24% had participated in the PMEA Festival Audition process, while 76% had not. However, more than half (54%) of students stated that they had participated in an instrumental ensemble that performed at adjudications or competitions. When asked what type of ensemble participated in an adjudication or competition, the most common response was marching band (131 responses), with other frequent responses including symphonic or concert band (101 responses), and jazz band or ensemble (72 responses).

Section 2: Experiencing Success

The second section contained questions relating to students’ experiences with success in the instrumental music classroom. For all of the questions in Section 2, students were asked to rate the statements on a Likert scale, offering four options: “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Agree”, and “Strongly Agree”. In the first question, 92% of students agreed, either “agree” or “strongly agree”, that they have felt successful while playing their instrument by themselves. Even further, in question two, when responding to the statement, “I have felt successful while performing in an instrumental ensemble”, 96% of students agreed, either “agree” or “strongly

agree”. In this instance, more than half of the respondents (53%) indicated that they “strongly agree” with the statement. With regard to the third statement, 97% of respondents agreed that they had experienced success by learning a new concept in an instrumental ensemble. Perhaps the most significant response was in the fourth statement, as 99% of all students agreed that they experienced success due to improvement in their individual playing ability. A lower rate (96%) agreed with experiencing success due to the overall quality of their instrumental ensemble improving. Only 59% of students agreed, either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree”, that they felt successful due to a rating or score that their ensemble received at an adjudication or competition. Of the students who had participated in the PMEA Festival Audition process, 70% agreed that they felt successful at least in part due to their individual qualification or advancement in the PMEA Festival process. Finally, when prompted to respond as to how the opinions and feedback of others affects their feeling of success, students more frequently felt successful due to the feedback of their teachers (91%) and family members (90%) than the feedback of their peers (83%).

Section 3: Defining Success

In Section 3, students were prompted with statements and asked to score how important or significant these factors are in determining their individual definition of success. Students scored each factor from 1 to 4, with 1 signifying “Not at All Important” and 4 representing “Extremely Important”. Students rated nine unique factors in the online survey, and the rating scores were averaged to an overall influence score. The factor with the greatest average influence score, making it the most influential factor in defining student success, was Improvement in Ensemble Quality (3.61). Other statistically significant factors included Improvement in Individual Ability (3.54), Individual Ability (3.52), and Ensemble Quality (3.51). Rating as less important to the

definition of success were Ensemble Rating/Score (3.09) and PMEA Festival Advancement (2.60). Student respondents were also tasked to rate the importance of other's opinions of their success. Similar to the previous section, students listed Teachers' Opinion of their Success as most important to their definition of success (3.39). In a close second was the Opinion of Family (3.32), and far behind in third was the Opinion of their Peers (2.86).

Section 4: Determining your Definition

The fourth section of the survey assessed the various factors that may influence students throughout the process of defining success. On a similar Likert scale to Section 2, students were asked to rate the statements from four options: "Strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Agree", and "Strongly Agree". In this section, students were asked to assess if various people or communities had influenced their definition of success. The four communities listed in the survey were Peers/Other Students, Teachers, Family Members, and Social Media. Of the four statements, students agreed most frequently that their teachers (93%) and family members (92%) had influenced them in their definition of success. Significantly further behind were their peers/other students (81%) and social media (52%).

Section 5: Demographics

The final section of the survey asked for simple demographic information from the respondents. This section was not required. However, only two students did not complete this section. The students that completed the survey represented a variety of grades in school, with the most common being 11th Grade/Junior (26%) and the least common being 7th Grade (3%). There was also representation among a variety of primary instruments, as all 16 of the listed instruments received responses from students. The most common primary instruments of survey respondents were saxophone (22%), clarinet (15%), trumpet (14%), and percussion (14%). Finally, 55% of

students identify as female, while 43% identify as male. The remaining students either chose to not respond, or selected “other”.

Focus Group Discussion Results

After the focus group transcripts were analyzed, the discussion responses related to each question (see Appendix B for complete discussion protocol) were examined based on focus group answers as displayed in Table 1. Complete focus group transcript analysis can be found in Appendix D. The following themes appeared in participant responses:

Table 1 Excerpt A (see Appendix D)

2	Yes; when I know I’m performing well	7	17
2	Yes; when the conductor praises my playing	7	18
2	Yes; after winning an award/competition	4	8
2	Yes; when I get to express myself	2	3

The second question in the focus group discussion protocol prompted students to discuss if and when they have felt or experienced success while engaged in their instrumental music programs. As seen in the table above, the most common response themes presented a unique dichotomy. Of the students involved in the discussion, 18 of them noted or made mention that they feel successful when their teacher, conductor, or music director praises their playing. However, 17 students also stated that they have an intrinsic self-awareness of when they are playing well or performing to the best of their ability, and this brings them a sense of success. It is interesting to note that there was a significant amount of crossover in these responses as well, as several students agreed that both teacher praise and intrinsic awareness made them feel successful. Common responses with less frequent occurrences included feeling success after earning an award or winning a competition, and experiencing success through self-expression.

Question number three asked students to describe and elaborate upon the specific instrumental music experiences that led to their feelings or experience of success. There was a great deal of variety in student responses for this question, and most focus groups experienced a spike in interest and conversation throughout this part of the discussion.

Table 1 Excerpt B (see Appendix D)

3	When I was told I am playing well (by teacher, parent, friend, anyone)	7	23
3	I just know that I'm performing to my best	7	20
3	When we finally achieve a difficult task as a group; something that we've been working on	7	18
3	When I am individually able to do things that I could not do before	7	21
3	When we won/scored high/earned a trophy	4	12
3	After the concert/performance was over	7	19
3	When I hear a recording of myself or our group performing	3	10
3	When I made PMEA All-State, Region, District Festival	5	13
3	When I see/hear one of my friends or band mates doing something really well	2	5
3	The moment of silence after we finish playing	2	6
3	I don't know what makes me feel successful	3	3

As displayed in the table above, student response varied greater for question three than for question two. Every student in the focus group discussion acknowledged that they experience success when they are told they have played or performed well. However, there were small discrepancies as to the messenger of this praise. Several students noted their teachers or family members, while others seemed more interested in their peers or ensemble members. Similarly to question two, the vast majority of respondents (21) claimed to experience success due to their

own intrinsic awareness and evaluation of their performance or playing. Several students noted that making noticeable improvements, either as an individual or as an ensemble, led to their experience of success. Although a few more students (3) recognized their individual improvement, it is significant to note that both ensemble and individual improvement were strong catalysts for feelings of success. Finally, the feeling of satisfaction or success after the completion of a concert or performance was also noted by most (19) of the students in the discussion.

There were several responses to question three that, although they did not appear in all focus group discussions and were not noted by all students, still appeared with some frequency. Extrinsic recognition through competition awards, ensemble ratings, and PMEA Festival advancement were all recognized by multiple students in the discussion. Additionally, several students (10) acknowledged that they feel successful when they are able to hear a recording of themselves or their ensemble performing. It is interesting to note that a few students (5) claimed that they experience a feeling of success when they see or hear their peers/band mates achieving success. Other students acknowledged the “moment of silence” after performing as a catalyst for their successful feelings. Finally, there were three students across three focus groups who initially stated that they did not know or could not express what experiences cause them feel successful in the instrumental music classroom.

The fourth question in the focus group discussion protocol examined the factors that students use to define their own success. Again, discussion was lively and presented a variety of responses, as seen in the table excerpt below.

Table 1 Excerpt C (See Appendix D)

4	Getting a good grade on my report card	7	19
4	Performing to the best of my ability	7	21
4	When our group “sounds good”	7	22
4	When we can overcome obstacles to put on a great performance; when we “get it”	7	19
4	Being in tune, in tone, and in time	3	10
4	Learning skills/being able to do things that I could not the day before	6	19
4	Putting on a great concert	7	20

Several similar response themes emerged in question four, as compared to questions two and three. Most students again noted an intrinsic awareness of either performing to the best of their ability (21) or their ensemble performing at a high level (22). Also, similar to question three, many students (19) acknowledged that overcoming obstacles and learning new skills, either as an ensemble or as an individual, was an important part of their definition of success in instrumental music. Finally, like the previous question, 20 students stated that putting on a great concert or performance was paramount to their experience of success.

There were also a few unique or previously unmentioned responses to question number four. For the first time in our discussion, the concept of academic grades and report cards was brought up. In one focus group, once a student made the suggestion that their academic grade was an important component of their definition of success, all of the other students in the discussion immediately agreed. This became a prevalent theme among all focus groups, as 19 of the 23 total members mentioned it in conversation. Additionally, students exclusively from three

schools enthusiastically contributed that playing “in tune, in tone, and in time” contributed to their feelings of success.

When prompted to discuss who or what has helped guide them to come to their definition of success, students answered question five with four primary responses. Two of the responses came with overwhelming consistency, while two others were less frequent in discussion.

Table 1 Excerpt D (see Appendix D)

5	My band director/music teacher sets our goals	7	22
5	We determine our own definition of success	6	18
5	My parents help make me feel successful	3	9
5	I’m successful because of my private teacher	2	5

Most frequently, students identified their ensemble leaders (band director, music teachers) as the primary goal setters. Although this does not directly lead to the causation of defining success, in this case, the students came to the consensus that because the leaders of the ensembles were setting goals for the group, they were also defining the success of the individuals within said group. Also prevalent among responses was the concept that students are responsible for determining their own definition of success. This idea of self-determination was presented or acknowledged by 18 of the 23 students involved in the discussions. Mentioned with less frequency was the involvement of family members and individual private music instructors.

The final question in the focus group discussion protocol asked students what success looks, feels, and sounds like in the music classroom. This discussion revisited some of the same ideas and success factors that had already been mentioned in previous questions, but also

provided a few new insights into the difficulty of capturing and expressing what it means to feel successful.

Table 1 Excerpt E (see Appendix D)

6	I know what I sound like at my best	6	18
6	When the audience applauds our performance	5	14
6	My teacher telling me that I've done well	6	17
6	If you don't know what it feels like, we can't explain it to you	2	3
6	It looks like a high grade on my report card	5	13

Similarly to previous questions, respondents expressed that there are extrinsic and intrinsic ways to recognize success in music. Many students (18) acknowledged that they have a personal sense of when they are performing at a high level. Additionally, the several students mentioned that success looks like a high grade on their report card (13 students), and sounds like applause at the end of a performance (14 students) or the words of praise from a teacher (17 students). Most interestingly, a few students captured the difficulty of expressing what success feels, looks, or sounds like. Of the 23 total students, three expressed that success in music was something that needed to be experienced, and that “If you don’t know what it feels like, we can’t explain it to you.”

Chapter 4: Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze how students define success in the instrumental music classroom. In this study, students first completed an online survey exploring the various factors and influences that determine their individual definitions of success. Selected students then also participated in small focus group discussions, further examining when they have felt successful and how they define success. Survey and focus group data was analyzed to determine the most influential factors for students when defining personal success in the instrumental music classroom. The results of this study have provided new awareness, but what conclusions can be drawn from this information gained? What affect may the conclusions of this study have on the practice of music educators? This chapter will discuss these possibilities.

After analyzing the online survey data and focus group discussion results, several conclusions can be drawn about student definitions of success in these Lycoming County music communities. The vast majority of students expressed feeling some degree of success while playing their instrument alone or in an ensemble. However, there was some discrepancy between the success students experience in an ensemble when compared to their individual success. Both survey data and focus group discussion found that students more frequently expressed that they felt successful while playing in an ensemble. This may be due to the traditional ensemble-based teaching practices that dominate instruction in Lycoming County schools. It is possible to suggest that students are more likely to feel successful in an ensemble setting because they have more experience playing in ensembles and feel more comfortable in this role. That being said, focus group discussion (and to a lesser extent survey data) discovered that students find it easier to detect improvement when playing alone, leading to a greater sense of success. If it is true that

it is easier for students to sense their own improvement while performing alone, then increased individual performance opportunities may also lead to greater opportunities to experience success for all students involved.

Research data regarding student awareness prompted a second conclusion from this study. Both the online survey and focus group discussion asked students to recognize moments when they have experienced success in the music classroom. With surprising consistency, students expressed that both intrinsic and extrinsic stimuli led to their feelings of success. As predicted, extrinsic factors such as academic grades, teacher praise, and audience applause were all recorded as elements that caused feelings of success. However, somewhat surprisingly, students responded just as frequently that their own intrinsic awareness of their playing ability, or their internal recognition of performance quality, was crucial to their experience of success. The research data presented in this study conclusively confirms that students feel successful in the music classroom due to both extrinsic and intrinsic stimuli. For this reason, it is imperative that teachers continue to empower students to recognize the value in their own playing and performance. Affording students the opportunity to realize their own worth and celebrate their performance will only increase the frequency with which they experience success in the music classroom.

While there were some similarities and common themes among student definitions and experiences of success, this study also suggests that all students experience success in a variety of ways. Just as students enter the classroom with a myriad of life experiences and personality traits, they also enter into music programs with unique and diverse expectations and understandings of what it means to be successful. In focus group discussion, several students indicated that they did not understand what made them feel successful, or that they could not

think of the factors that led them to define success in music. While this may initially seem disheartening, it does show the true nature of success in the classroom. Even in its simplest form, defining success is not easy. Understanding success is a concept that students and teachers alike may struggle with from time to time. To welcome and embrace the struggle is to understand that there is not one correct answer when defining success in the instrumental music classroom.

Another impactful conclusion drawn from this study concerns the influences and factors that lead to students developing their personal definition of success. While each student possesses countless unique personality traits and experiences, the influence of teachers and ensemble leaders on the success that students feel in the classroom cannot be understated. Almost all of the students involved in this study, both survey respondents and discussion group participants, indicated that their music teachers played a pivotal role in the development of their definition of musical success. While this may seem to be an obvious conclusion, it brings to light one of the greater responsibilities that faces the educational community. If music teachers are highly influential in students defining their own success, then the music education community must embrace the variety of opportunities that exist for students to experience success in music. Channeling all of our students, regardless of interests, traits, or personality, into a unified definition of success only hinders their potential for success and lifelong music engagement.

The conclusions drawn from this study have changed the way I think about my role as an educator and the goals by which I structure my classroom. Prior to conducting this study, I expected to be able to find more concrete explanations of what makes each student feel successful, with the hope of using this data to inform my teaching and make recommendations for my own teaching and the profession as a whole. Upon completing this study, I realize that this goal and mindset were shortsighted and somewhat judgmental in nature. As previously

stated, this study has shown me that all students possess unique interpretations and experiences with success. These differing definitions of success are not to be considered “better” or “worse”, or “right” or “wrong”. The dichotomy in these evaluative terms only takes away from the true purpose of this study: to help understand what makes students feel successful in music. After completing this study, I have gained a new appreciation for the various meanings and experiences that all students contribute and share as their own definition of success. Instead of working to convert all students in my classroom to a unified “correct” definition of success, I look forward to helping each of my students along their individual path to success in music.

APPENDICES**Appendix A: Online Survey Protocol****Section 1: Instrumental Experiences**

1. I have participated in the PMEA District, Region, or State audition process.
 - a. Yes b. No
2. I have participated in an instrumental ensemble that performed in competitions or adjudications.
 - a. Yes b. No
3. If yes, please list the competitive instrumental ensembles in which you have participated.

Section 2: Experiencing Success

Please respond as to whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about your personal success in the instrumental music classroom.

4. I have felt successful while playing my instrument by myself.
 - a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree
5. I have felt successful while performing in an instrumental ensemble.
 - a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree
6. I have felt successful because I learned a new concept in an instrumental ensemble.
 - a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree
7. I have felt successful because my individual playing improved.
 - a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree
8. I have felt successful because the quality of my instrumental ensemble improved.
 - a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree

9. I have felt successful because of the rating/score my instrumental ensemble received at an adjudication or competition.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree

e. I have not experienced an ensemble adjudication or competition.

10. I have felt successful because of my individual qualification or advancement in PMEA District, Region, or State instrumental ensembles.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree

e. I have not experienced the PMEA Audition process.

11. I have felt successful because of the opinions, comments, or feedback of my peers.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree

12. I have felt successful because of the opinions, comments, or feedback of my family.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree

13. I have felt successful because of the opinions, comments, or feedback of my teacher(s).

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree

Section 3: Defining Success

Please rate the importance of the following musical factors in your personal feeling of success in the instrumental music classroom.

14. Individual ability to play my instrument

Not at all important	1	2	3	4	Extremely important
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15. Improvement in my individual ability to play my instrument

Not at all important	1	2	3	4	Extremely important
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16. Quality of the entire instrumental ensemble

Not at all important	1	2	3	4	Extremely important
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17. Improvement in the quality of the entire instrumental ensemble

Not at all important 1 2 3 4 Extremely important

18. Instrumental ensemble rating at an Adjudication/Competition

Not at all important 1 2 3 4 Extremely important

19. Individual PMEA Festival Qualification/Advancement (District, Region, State)

Not at all important 1 2 3 4 Extremely important

20. My peers think I am successful

Not at all important 1 2 3 4 Extremely important

21. My family thinks I am successful

Not at all important 1 2 3 4 Extremely important

22. My teacher(s) think(s) I am successful

Not at all important 1 2 3 4 Extremely important

Section 4: Determining your Definition

Please respond as to whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about determining your definition of success in the instrumental music classroom.

23. Other students have influenced my definition of success.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree

24. My teacher(s) has/have influenced my definition of success.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree

25. My family has influenced my definition of success.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree

26. Social media has influenced my definition of success.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree

Section 5: Demographics

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability.

27. Current Grade

7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
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28. Primary Instrument

Flute
Oboe
Clarinet
Saxophone
Bassoon
Trumpet
Horn
Trombone
Euphonium/Baritone
Tuba
Percussion
Violin
Viola
Cello
Bass
Piano

29. Current School District

East Lycoming
Jersey Shore
Loyalsock Township
Montgomery
Montoursville
Muncy
South Williamsport
Williamsport

30. Gender Identity

Female	Male	Other	Prefer not to say
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Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Protocol

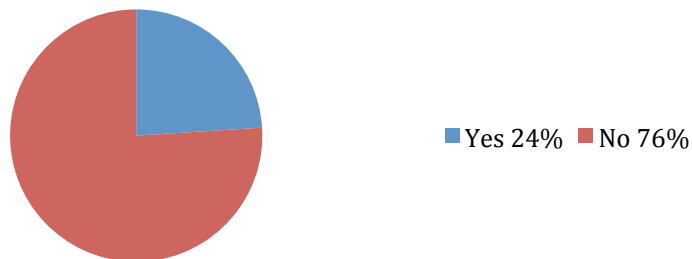
Thank you for coming in today to share your insight regarding your instrumental music experiences. For our discussion purposes today, I encourage you to share whatever information comes to mind. Please be courteous of the other members in our group, as all who wish to share will have the opportunity to do so. When it appears that discussion has been exhausted on a particular subject or question, I will pose another question to the group. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. What types of instrumental music experiences have you had?
2. Have you felt successful while engaged in any of these experiences?
3. If so, what specific actions or experiences led to your feeling of success?
 - a. Playing by yourself?
 - b. Playing with others/as a part of a group?
 - c. Noticing your playing improve?
 - d. Noticing that your group/ensemble improved?
 - e. Learning something new?
 - f. Earning a high score or winning a trophy?
 - g. Qualifying or advancing to a PMEA Festival?
4. How do you define success in the instrumental music classroom?
5. What factors have led you to come up with your definition of success?
 - a. Family?
 - b. Friends?
 - c. Teachers?
6. As you reflect on your instrumental music experiences, what does “feeling successful” look, sound, or feel like?
7. Is there anything else on your mind that you would like to share with me, or with the group? Do you have any questions for me?

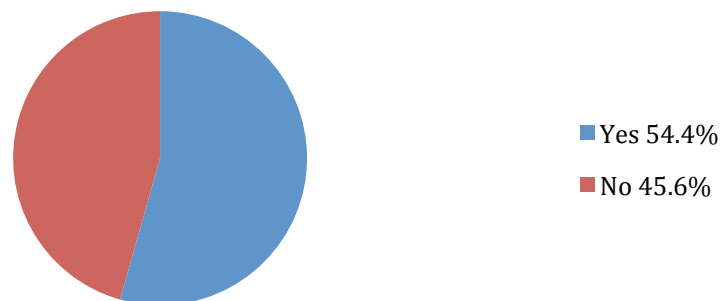
Appendix C: Online Survey Data

Section 1: Instrumental Experiences

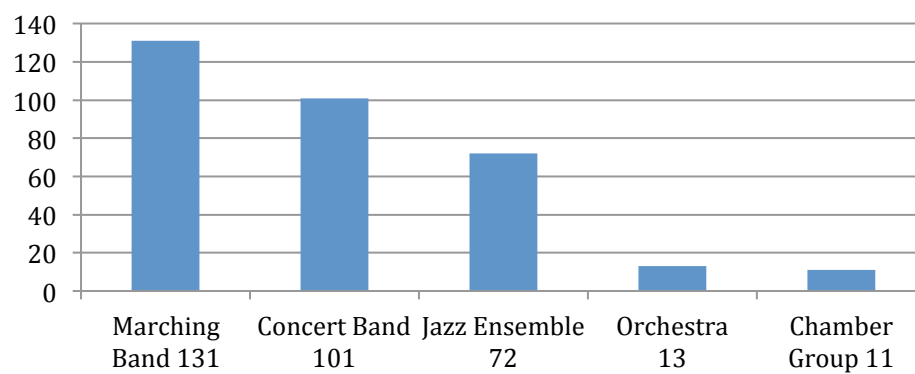
1. I have participated in the PMEA District, Region, or State audition process.



2. I have participated in an instrumental ensemble that performed in competitions or adjudications.

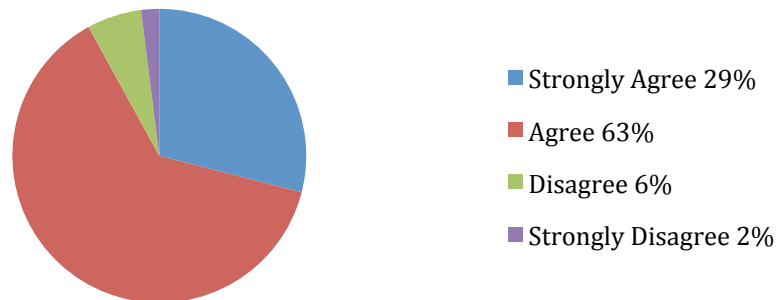


3. If yes, please list the competitive instrumental ensembles in which you have participated.

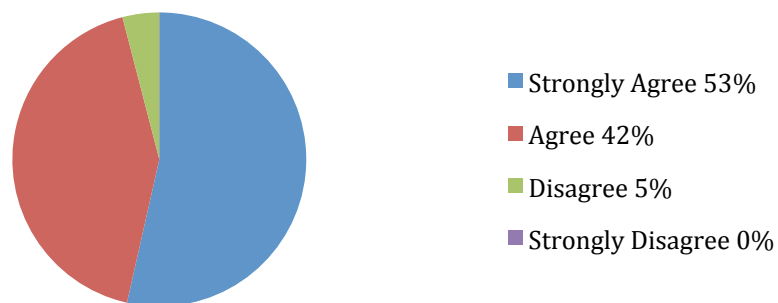


Section 2: Experiencing Success

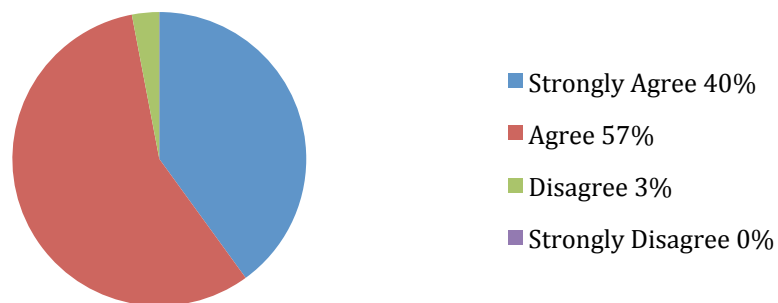
4. I have felt successful while playing my instrument by myself.



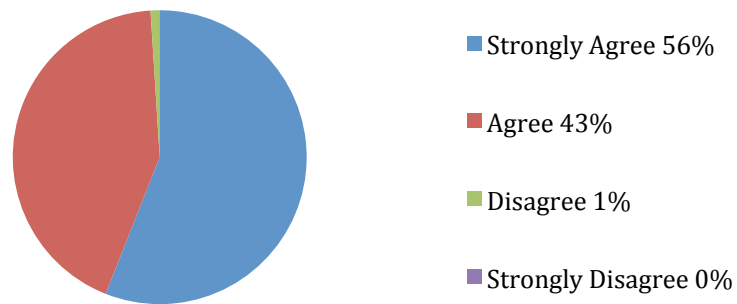
5. I have felt successful while performing in an instrumental ensemble.



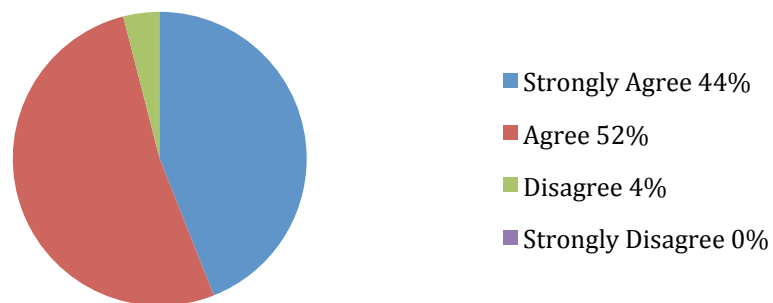
6. I have felt successful because I learned a new concept in an instrumental ensemble.



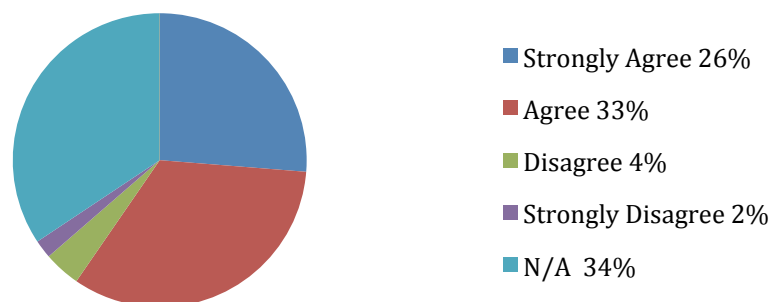
7. I have felt successful because my individual playing improved.



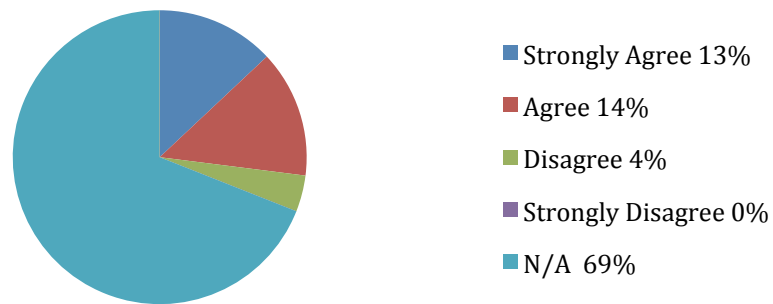
8. I have felt successful because the quality of my instrumental ensemble improved.



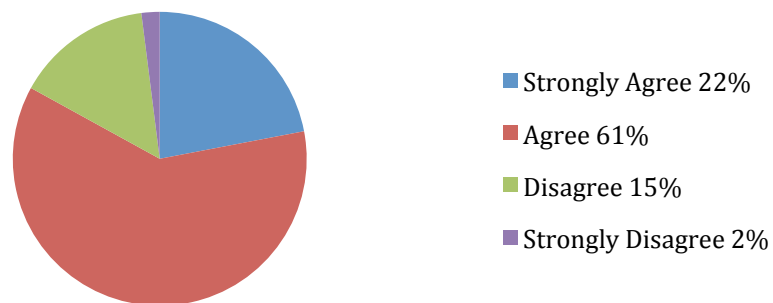
9. I have felt successful because of the rating/score my instrumental ensemble received at an adjudication or competition.



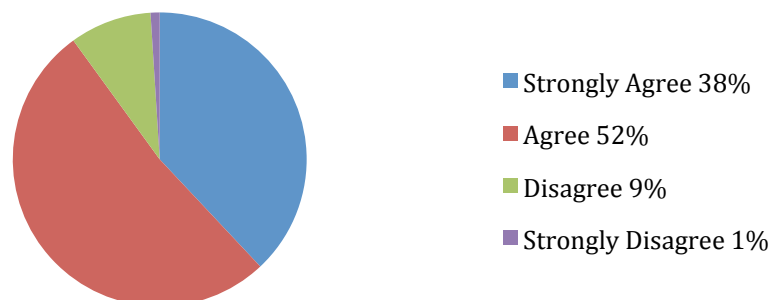
10. I have felt successful because of my individual qualification or advancement in PMEA District, Region, or State instrumental ensembles.



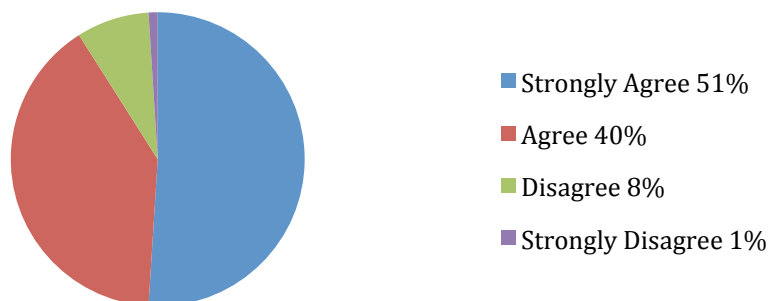
11. I have felt successful because of the opinions, comments, or feedback of my peers.



12. I have felt successful because of the opinions, comments, or feedback of my family.



13. I have felt successful because of the opinions, comments, or feedback of my teacher(s).

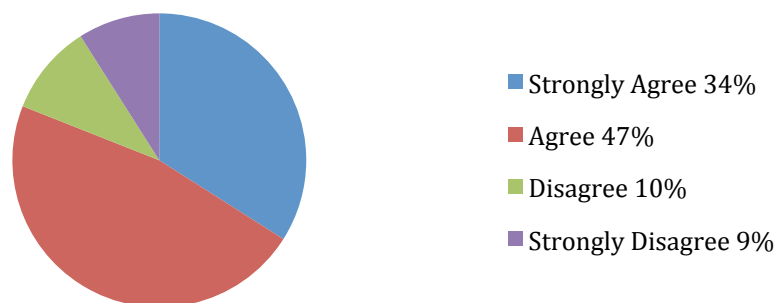


Section 3: Defining Success

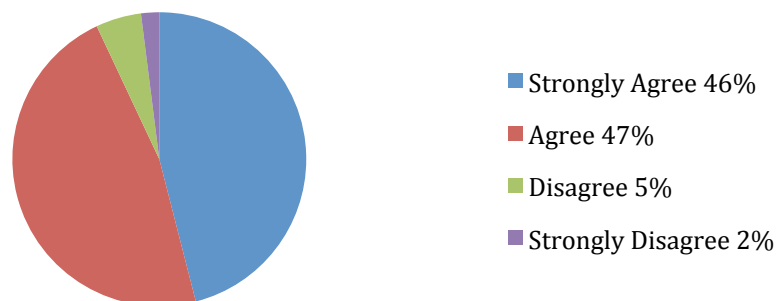
14. Individual ability to play my instrument	3.52
15. Improvement in my individual ability to play my instrument	3.54
16. Quality of the entire instrumental ensemble	3.51
17. Improvement in the quality of the entire instrumental ensemble	3.61
18. Instrumental ensemble rating at an Adjudication/Competition	3.09
19. Individual PMEA Festival Qualification/Advancement	2.60
20. My peers think I am successful	2.86
21. My family thinks I am successful	3.32
22. My teacher(s) think(s) I am successful	3.39

Section 4: Determining your Definition

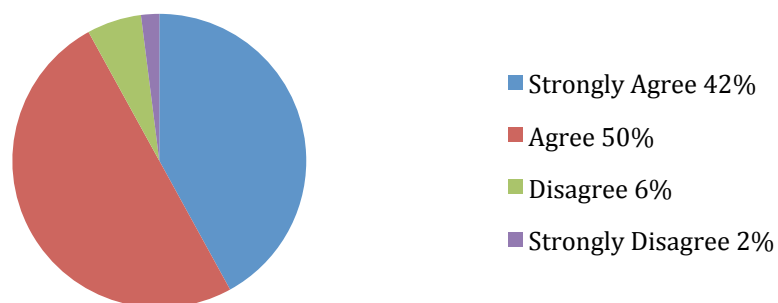
23. Other students have influenced my definition of success.



24. My teacher(s) has/have influenced my definition of success.



25. My family has influenced my definition of success.

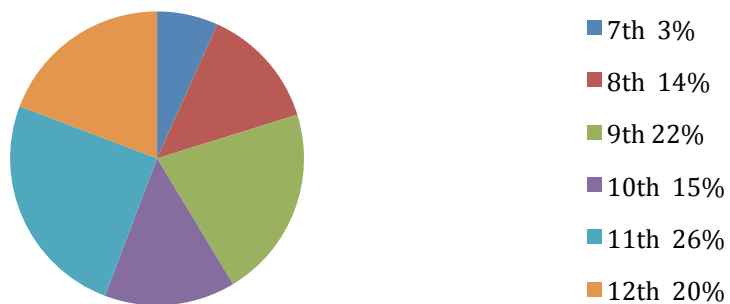


26. Social media has influenced my definition of success.

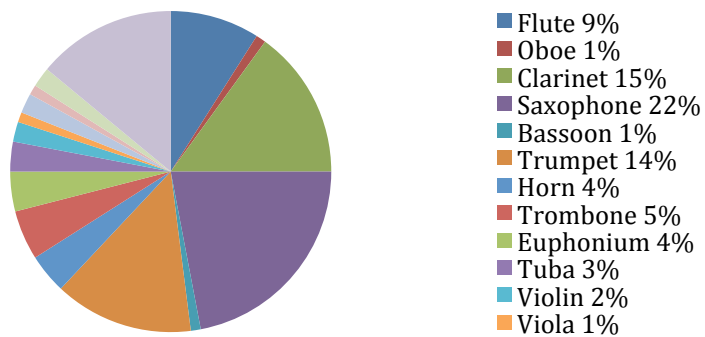


Section 5: Demographics

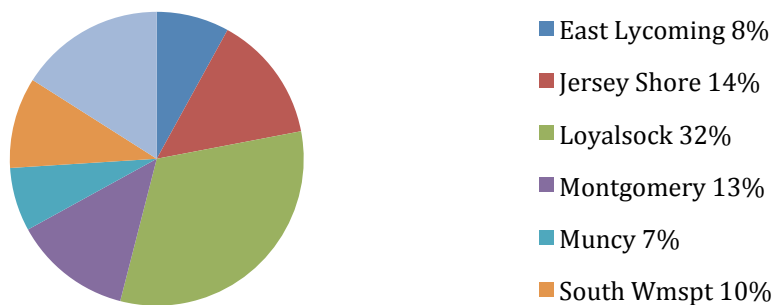
27. Current Grade



28. Primary Instrument



29. Current School District



30. Gender Identity

Female, **55%**Male, **43%**Other, **1%**Prefer not to say, **1%**

Appendix D: Focus Group Discussion Data

Table 1: Emergent Themes and Frequencies from Focus Group Discussions

Question #	Repeated Response Theme	Focus Group (7)	Individual (23)
1	Concert/Symphonic Band or Wind Ensemble	7	20
1	Marching Band	7	17
1	Jazz Ensemble	7	15
1	Orchestra	4	8
1	Small groups/chamber music	4	9
2	Yes; when I know I'm performing well	7	17
2	Yes; when the conductor praises my playing	7	18
2	Yes; after winning an award/competition	4	8
2	Yes; when I get to express myself	2	3
3	When I was told I am playing well (by teacher, parent, friend, anyone)	7	23
3	I just know that I'm performing to my best	7	20
3	When we finally achieve a difficult task as a group; something that we've been working on	7	18
3	When I am individually able to do things that I could not do before	7	21
3	When we won/scored high/earned a trophy	4	12
3	After the concert/performance was over	7	19
3	When I hear a recording of myself or our group performing	3	10
3	When I made PMEA All-State, Region, District Festival	5	13
3	When I see/hear one of my friends or band mates doing something really well	2	5
3	The moment of silence after we finish playing	2	6
3	I don't know what makes me feel successful	3	3

Table 1: Continued

Question #	Repeated Response Theme	Focus Group (7)	Individual (23)
4	Getting a good grade on my report card	7	19
4	Performing to the best of my ability	7	21
4	When our group “sounds good”	7	22
4	When we can overcome obstacles to put on a great performance; when we “get it”	7	19
4	Being in tune, in tone, and in time	3	10
4	Learning skills/being able to do things that I could not the day before	6	19
4	Putting on a great concert	7	20
4	Getting a high score at contest	4	11
5	My band director/music teacher sets our goals	7	22
5	We determine our own definition of success	6	18
5	My parents help make me feel successful	3	9
5	I’m successful because of my private teacher	2	5
6	I know what I sound like at my best	6	18
6	When the audience applauds our performance	5	14
6	My teacher telling me that I’ve done well	6	17
6	If you don’t know what it feels like, we can’t explain it to you	2	3
6	It looks like a high grade on my report card	5	13

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