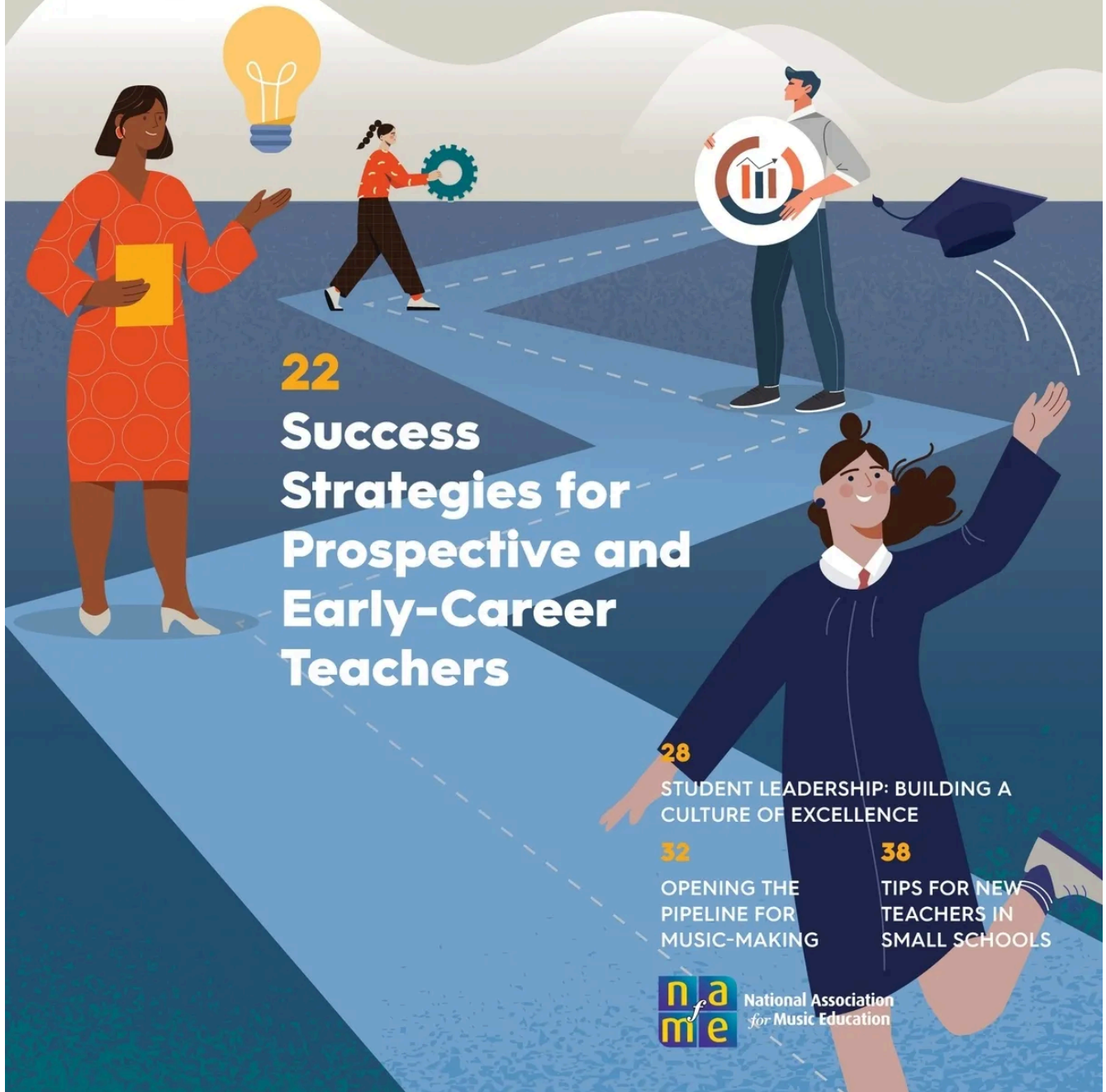


TEACHING music

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SARAH FAWN W. MCLAMB AND
KYLE J. WEARY

Dictator No More! Building Autonomy with Student-Led Instruction

Teaching your students to take important responsibilities in the music classroom can produce amazing results.

Traditional music ensembles must adapt to collaborative learning trends to stay relevant. The “conductor/dictator” model from the past is one that no longer works. Theodore Roosevelt reminded us that “People ask the difference between a leader and a boss. The leader leads, and the boss drives.”

As K-12 classroom teachers, we recognize many classroom activities for which student leaders can take charge. By involving our students, we can become more efficient in our teaching and streamline what is happening in our classrooms. We define the outcomes of what needs to be accomplished and coach our choirs to reach these objectives, then we ask the questions and coach the students as they seek out answers. We

do not need to have the answers all the time, which is incredibly helpful and stress reducing.

Many music educators use students as leaders for running warm-ups, sectionals, and leading rehearsals when they are out of the building for various events or absences. Involving student leaders while you are in the building, however, not only helps students in their music-making, but also helps them strengthen their music-leading skills. While we have a select few students who possess the ability to lead rehearsals or warm-ups, all students can be responsible for making sure that every

detail is caught before a concert is presented to the public.

Kyle Weary: Sticky Note Tip

During the month before a concert, I had students pick up sticky notes at the beginning of rehearsals. During rehearsal they would jot down specific information for songs that needed work that they heard, including measure numbers and what was wrong (diction, rhythms,

notes, and which voice part, etc.). At the end of rehearsal, they would place that sticky note on the board at the front of the classroom under the title of the piece. Section leaders would compile the information for me to create the next rehearsal plan. As items got fixed, sticky notes would get taken down, with the goal of students having no sticky notes left on the board by the beginning of concert week.

Fall Concert Fixes

Chamber Choir

Salmo 150		Nyon, Nyon		Soldier Boy	
Soprano m. 3-4 rhythms	Tenors m. 9-10 text & rhythm	Sop/Alto m. 13-14 rhythms	SATB m. 25-26 crescendo	Soprano m. 11-19 staggered breaths	Tenors m. 3-9 vowel shapes
Altos m. 16-18 notes	Basses m. 1-5 vowel shape	SATB m. 29-32 build up of intensity & volume	SATB m. 51 crescendo/ decrescendo	Altos m. 29-37 intonation	Basses m. 41-45 intonation

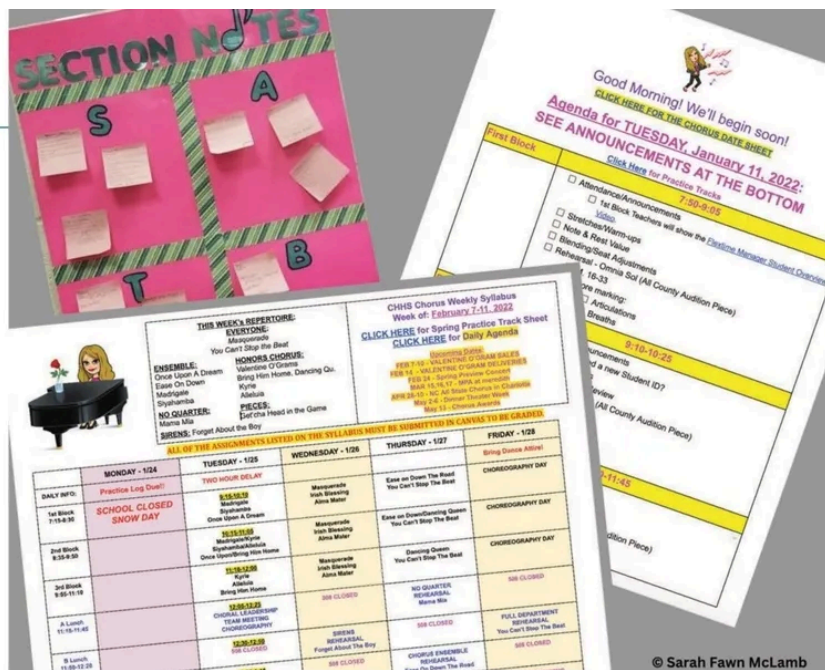
Sarah Fawn: Run Your Classroom Like a Business

I have students involved in every aspect of concert and rehearsal planning.

In the first days of the semester, we have class discussions about concert dates, state-approved repertoire lists, and our state curriculum standards. Students then take that information and explore song selection choices together. When they know the parameters that they must navigate to choose their repertoire, they get on board with my guidance. This buy-in results in greater involvement during the rehearsals.

We run our classroom like a business, and I am the CEO. A list of teams and job descriptions is created for each area, and a student is selected as the team manager for each project. The first few weeks of the semester are spent getting students acclimated to their responsibilities, looking at performance dates, and discussing how the roles of the different teams interact.

Students interview for the positions and teams. I meet regularly with the managers and give time at the end of each class for managers to meet with their teams. Teams vary from semester to semester (depending on the types of performances that are in preparation). Usually, the teams include a Choreography Team, a Costuming and Makeup Team, a Set Design Team, a Stage Crew, a Tech Crew, a Marketing and Graphic Design Team, a



Box Office Team, and a Hospitality Team.

We begin with the concert date and work backward to establish milestone dates, and we use weekly and daily agendas that we constantly revise to make sure we are ready for the concert. Rehearsal time is more efficient because the class operates like a business. Long-term goals are achieved via short-term milestones. Do students want higher scores at the Music Performance Adjudication? If so, then the long-term goal focuses on sight-reading with short-term milestones of check-ins for sectionals. Do students want better projection when they are doing a show choir number but do not have funding for better mics? If so, then the long-term goal is to improve breathing technique.

In class, a weekly planning syllabus and a daily agenda checklist are used to make sure goals are met. Students play an active role in monitoring

the list, modifying it as each rehearsal progresses, as well as planning for the next day's checklist at the conclusion of class in their team meetings and sectionals.

Ownership and Autonomy

With a more collaborative structure, opportunities are created for students to develop 21st-century learning skills that they can use for the rest of their lives and in future careers.

The soft skills that music students learn are desirable for many careers and majors in higher education: self-discipline and responsibility, adaptability, perseverance, communication, teamwork, openness to feedback, and confidence. By adding the extra set of skills that students get by learning through the collaborative nature of running our programs like a business, students can also learn leadership skills, discover how to think outside the box, get practice paying

attention to details, and gain the capacity to work together as a team.

A collaborative learning environment gives ownership and autonomy to students in a way they are not given in other classes. The entire choral program benefits from the collaborative striving toward success by all members. Almost any music program can use these techniques to teach students how to become good managers of their time and their lives. ☐



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