

MacPhail Northside Youth Orchestra

2022-2023 Evaluation Results

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Key findings

This report provides information about the outcomes and implementation of the MacPhail Northside Youth Orchestra (MNYO) for the 2022-23 school year. A few key findings are presented below.

- Students and instructors report continued student growth in music skills and interest in music. Particularly, learning to practice and understanding the value of practicing were common benefits shared by MNYO students.

Practice is really important. I remember I first joined and I really [didn't] like practicing, but I really had to learn to just say, 'Okay, you know what? I just got to do it and just learn to get better,' and it made me appreciate practicing. I saw myself getting better. – MNYO student

- Students and instructors report skills and growth beyond music, such as leadership, focus, independent learning, and perseverance.

Knowing that I'm putting a lot of effort into [music] makes me realize that I can do this with my other subjects in school. So, I feel more motivation, especially when I feel frustrated. This frustration is okay, it's normal and it's going to keep happening... I shouldn't be giving up, or I should take a rest and continue later on. – MNYO student

- Students report the relationships, community, and welcoming environment of MNYO are key program components. This was also a common reason for students to continue participating in MNYO from year to year—because of the relationships and community MNYO offers.

We're just really a group where anyone could come in. It really is. It's just like, it's a safe space. We play awesome music. The people are awesome. It really is just a great place to be. I'm happy to go there every Saturday- MNYO student

- Students had relatively few recommendations for program improvement, often citing positive feedback and gratitude. The most common suggestion was to find ways to increase recruitment or grow the ensemble.

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Program overview

MacPhail Center for Music's School Partnerships enrich the lives of young people and their families in Minnesota by providing in-person or live online instruction in partnership with Minnesota schools. MacPhail staff work with school music educators and administrators to develop customized programs that provide relevant and compelling music education to strengthen student learning. These programs are individually designed for each school to ensure custom supports are in place to enable children and youth to succeed.

The 2022-23 school year marked the sixth year of the MacPhail Northside Youth Orchestra (MNYO). It was formed in 2016 as a destination for students who aged out of the Ascension and Harvest Programs, which are a part of the MacPhail Center for Music's School Partnerships programming. MNYO has formed a community of young musicians from numerous schools in Minneapolis and the surrounding area. MNYO is a tuition-free ensemble, and the program provides instrument assistance to students in need.

MNYO's weekly rehearsals include full orchestra rehearsals, instrument-specific sectionals, and bucket drumming. There is a strong emphasis on community and inclusion; the program is focused on serving students who often do not have access to music education and learning. It is also inclusive of students with varying levels of musical skills. MNYO includes numerous performances in and around the community, including a performance partnership with the Minnesota Orchestra. A 4-5 day summer retreat at Madeline Island Chamber Music Camp has been added to the program calendar to help build community and keep continuity in the summer. When students return from this summer retreat, they do a tour of North Minneapolis for National Night Out to Share what they learned. Twenty-four youth regularly participated in MNYO in the 2022-23 school year.

Scholarships and program funders

The Roderick Cox Music Initiative and the Children's Music Arts Foundation provided scholarships to five MNYO students. In addition, the MNYO program receives funding from The Curtis L. Carlson Family Foundation, Minnesota State Arts Board, Patrick and Aimee Butler Family Foundation, Carolyn Foundation, George Family Foundation, and Aroha Philanthropies.

Roderick Cox Music Initiative Scholarship

The Roderick Cox Music Initiative (RCMI) began in 2019 as a program to nurture the next generation of musicians and conductors through music scholarships granted over three years to underserved youth of color in the Twin Cities. Each scholarship is given to a student who aspires to have a future in classical music. Funds from the RCMI are designated for summer camps, instrument repair/purchases, advanced training programs, private lessons, and mentorship by Roderick Cox and professional musicians in the area. The goal of RCMI is to help make the pathway for young musicians of color a little easier by alleviating some

financial burden and providing the necessary networking and training needed to be a successful musician. In the 2022-23 school year, three students from the MacPhail Northside Youth Orchestra were awarded the RCMI Scholarship.

Children’s Music and Arts Foundation Scholarship

In 2006, the Children’s Music and Arts Foundation (CMAF) gave its assets to MacPhail Center for Music to establish a permanently endowed fund to support the work of MacPhail. The Children’s Music and Arts Fund of MacPhail Center for Music was made possible with the generous support of Charlotte and Arsham Ohanessian. Ohanessian, born in an Armenian community of Baghdad, Iraq, became a generous philanthropist in his adopted home of Minnesota. In retirement, he continued playing the violin and reading ancient poetry. Ohanessian befriended Tom Keller and Chris Clouser, founding board members of the Children’s Music and Arts Foundation, and subsequently directed a portion of his legacy to the foundation. The dream of Clouser and Keller was to provide financial assistance for elementary and high school students in need of help to continue their music studies. Today, the fund provides essential support for all need-based awards offered to qualified MacPhail students. In the 2022-23 school year, two students from the MacPhail Northside Youth Orchestra was awarded the CMAF Scholarship.

Evaluation

Wilder Research worked with MacPhail program coordinators to develop an evaluation design for the program. The evaluation includes outcome and implementation components and gathers qualitative and quantitative data to answer the following research questions.

Key evaluation questions

- To what extent does student participation in MNYO affect student musical skills and knowledge?
- To what extent does student participation in MNYO affect student non-musical skills (persistence, motivation, leadership)?
- To what extent does student participation in MNYO affect overall student wellbeing, including social connections and mental health?
- What motivates students to join? What motivates students to continue to participate?
- How well is MNYO being implemented? What aspects of the program can be strengthened or improved?

This report describes the methodology and findings of the evaluation.

Methodology

In the 2022-23 school year, MacPhail and Wilder Research worked together to collect information on the MNYO program through surveys, interviews, and program records. Descriptions of these tools are listed here according to which component of the evaluation they addressed.

Lesson progress report: A progress report was designed to help assess students' musical skills, knowledge, and non-academic skills (persistence, initiative, and leadership during the program). Progress reports were completed by Teaching Artists at the end of the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters. Progress reports for 23 participants were completed at the end of the fall 2022 semester and at the end of the spring 2022 semester, allowing for comparisons across both semesters.

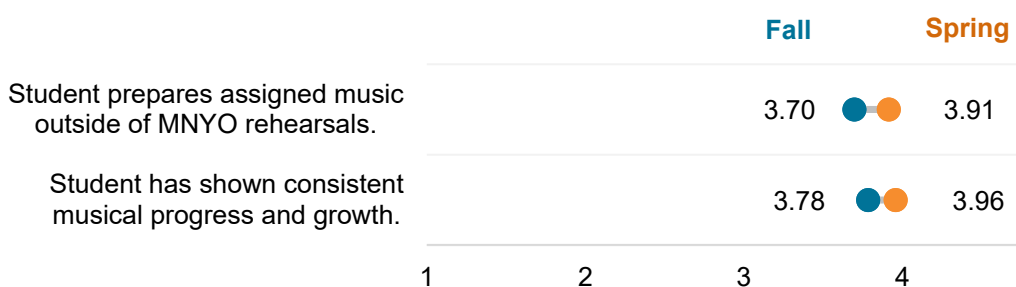
Student interview: MNYO staff and Wilder Research partnered to interview students to learn directly about their personal experience of the program. The interviews asked about students' favorite parts of MNYO, what they've learned, the role of music in their lives long-term, challenges related to MNYO, and suggestions to improve the program. Wilder interviewed eight students who have been in MNYO for two to seven years.

Results

Students demonstrate continued interest and growth in music

The progress reports completed by MNYO instructors indicate students show consistent musical progress and growth, and students prepare assigned music outside of MNYO rehearsals (Figure 1). Students were rated relatively high on these indicators in both fall and spring semesters, all rated either “always” or “most of the time” during both time periods, resulting in a mean score of 3.70 or above out of a possible 4.0. No students received a lower rating in the spring than the fall.

1. Instructor reports of students’ musical skills (N=23)



During the interviews, students also spoke of musical growth when asked what they’ve learned or gained from MNYO. Similar to the instructor reports, students spoke about learning the value of practicing their music outside of rehearsals.

The MNYO music ended up being a lot harder than music I was currently doing. So, I felt I learned a lot more because I had to practice more as well because it was harder music. – MNYO student

Practice is really important. I remember I first joined and I really [didn’t] like practicing, but I really had to learn to just say, ‘Okay, you know what? I just got to do it and just learn to get better,’ and it made me appreciate practicing. I saw myself getting better. – MNYO student

Some students mentioned musical growth, including improving sight-reading skills, feeling musically challenged, gaining a deeper understanding of musical expression, and appreciation for the music selected to perform.

Students express long-term interest in music

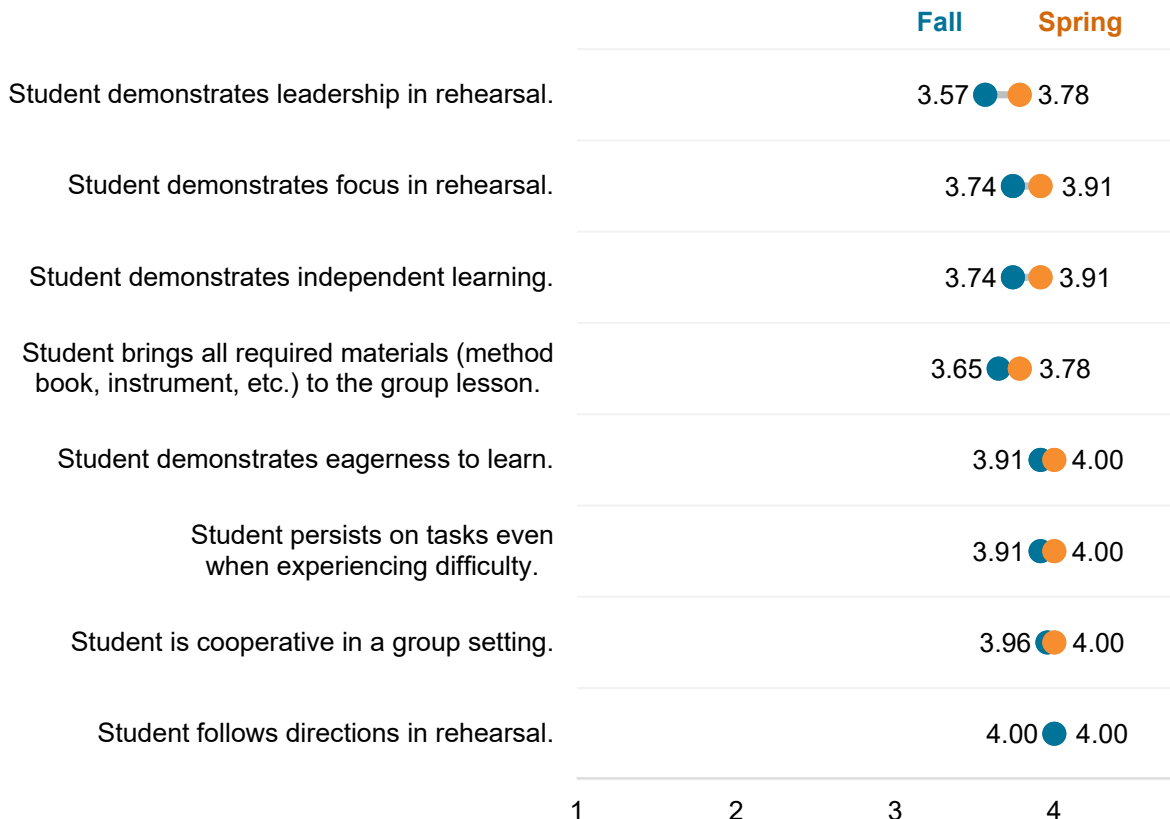
Students were asked how they view the role of music long-term in their lives, beyond MNYO and high school. All students said they plan on staying involved in music in some way, such as through a music minor in college, seeking out informal or community education groups, or continuing to play. A few expressed the importance and value of music in their lives.

I'd like to be in a community orchestra or something. Just keep me tied with music because really thinking about it, I don't think I could have a life without playing and performing. It really is a part of me.— MNYO student

Students and instructors report skills and growth beyond music, such as leadership, focus, independent learning, and perseverance

Instructors and students report developing or deepening skills and learnings beyond strictly music. Ratings from student progress reports improved for all indicators from fall to spring, except for students following directions in rehearsal, which all students were rated with the highest rating on for both fall and spring semesters. As mentioned previously, students were rated either “always” or “most of the time” on all indicators for both fall and spring, resulting in a mean score of 3.5 or above out of a possible 4.0. The indicator with the biggest change was that students demonstrate leadership in rehearsal, moving almost a quarter of a point.

2. Instructor reports of students’ non-musical skills (N=23)



Students also recognized benefits from the program beyond strictly the musical realm. Related to the value of practicing, a couple of students spoke about how practicing music was beneficial for other areas of life, such as academics or general life lessons, and how practicing led to patience and perseverance, learning how to fix mistakes, and learning how to ask for help when needed. One student also compared practicing music to “practicing” for an upcoming math test.

Knowing that I'm putting a lot of effort into [music] makes me realize that I can do this with my other subjects in school. So I feel more motivation, especially when I feel frustrated. This frustration is okay, it's normal and it's going to keep happening... I shouldn't be giving up or I should take a rest and continue later on.
– MNYO student

Students report the relationships, community, and welcoming environment of MNYO are key program components

Students were asked to share their favorite or best parts of MNYO. Students most frequently mentioned the relationships and community that MNYO offers, such as feeling that people care about each other, are close with each other, or that MNYO “feels like family.” This includes relationships with MNYO staff and with fellow student musicians. A few students also noted that MNYO feels like an open space where everyone is welcome, or that they simply have fun at MNYO. As one student explained it, they are all choosing to spend their Saturdays at MNYO rehearsals.

We're just really a group where anyone could come in. It really is. It's just like, it's a safe space. We play awesome music. The people are awesome. It really is just a great place to be. I'm happy to go there every Saturday. – MNYO student

How it feels like a family, I'd say. I just like to look and watch and how everyone's interacting. I just feel like it's music, but I also feel loved in a way. – MNYO student

Some students also talked about events or performances as some of their favorite parts of MNYO. For example, they mentioned Music Matters performances that always have a musical theme, chances to perform in the community for events like National Night Out, and performing with other ensembles. As mentioned previously, a few students also mentioned appreciation for the opportunity to further grow musically.

Student motivation to join MNYO and motivation to stay

Similarly, students were asked why they initially joined MNYO and then why they continued to be a part of MNYO. Commonly, students joined because they were encouraged by a parent or teacher in their life. A few noted seeking out a different musical ensemble than what was available to them through their school or other avenues, such as something more challenging or with a different schedule. For why they stayed, many again talked about the

people and the relationships they built within the group and the overall experience MNYO offers. A few explained that MNYO “feels different” than other orchestras, in that it’s generally a welcoming and fun space.

The people, for sure. I know I could find other orchestras, but it really is the people that make it amazing. – MNYO student

It's different than a traditional orchestra, because [the director is] fun and we know everybody in the orchestra...I feel like it's not as serious. It's still serious, but it's not pressure all the time to be perfect. – MNYO student

I would say the teachers [bring me back]. They really seem to care. They're always willing to help. It's really never a dull moment in MNYO. There's always laughter, and it's really just fun. – MNYO student

Suggestions from students

Overall, students had positive feedback on MNYO and expressed gratitude for the program. There were few suggestions or recommendations to further improve the program.

Increased recruitment or more student musicians in the ensemble

The most common point of feedback was a desire for more students or a larger ensemble. As one student said, they wouldn’t change anything about MNYO except “just having more people experience MNYO.” Some ideas to help with recruitment included: promotional videos, flyers, and ads, including on social media; visiting schools or other programs to share; and general word of mouth. Since quite a few students shared they originally joined MNYO because a parent encouraged them, reaching parents or caregivers first may be an additional way to help with recruitment.

Other student recommendations included:

- Performances outside of the Twin Cities metro region
- Upgraded loaner instruments for advanced students who may benefit from a higher quality instrument
- Make practice rooms at the MacPhail building available for MNYO student use
- Include more challenging or rigorous music

Final thoughts

Through instructor progress reports and interviews with MNYO students, the evaluation from this year demonstrates that students are continuing to grow and deepen in their musical skills and interest; further developing skills like leadership, independent learning, and perseverance; and that a key benefit of MNYO is the community, relationships, and welcoming environment it provides.

A critical question this year was around student motivation to participate. The interviews we completed showed that students were often originally encouraged by a parent or teacher in their life, or were seeking out a different musical opportunity than what was already available to them. For why students continue to participate, most noted the community of MNYO as a key factor. This information can be beneficial in exploring MNYO recruitment, which was also the most common student suggestion. Some potential avenues for recruitment include:

- Ad campaigns through promotional videos, flyers, and social media (Instagram, Facebook, etc.)
- Visit schools with music programs to spread awareness, or through music instructors elsewhere
- Word of mouth – tell students and parents to spread the word to their friends and communities
- Find ways to engage and spread the word to parents or caregivers specifically
- Offer an open house or opportunity to “drop-in” during rehearsals for interested students to experience MNYO before auditioning, since many students expressed that the environment and community of MNYO is what keeps them participating

Appendix

A. Figures

A1. Changes in musical skills from mid-year to end of year (N=23)

Behavior		Always (4)	Most of the time (3)	Sometimes (2)	Never (1)	Mean	Change
Student prepares assigned music outside of MNYO rehearsals.	Fall	70%	30%	0%	0%	3.70	+0.22
	Spring	91%	9%	0%	0%	3.91	
Student has shown consistent musical progress and growth.	Fall	78%	22%	0%	0%	3.78	+0.17
	Spring	96%	4%	0%	0%	3.96	

A2. Changes in non-musical skills from mid-year to end of year (N=23)

Behavior		Always (4)	Most of the time (3)	Sometimes (2)	Never (1)	Mean	Change
Student demonstrates leadership in class.	Fall	57%	44%	0%	0%	3.57	+0.22
	Spring	78%	22%	0%	0%	3.78	
Student demonstrates focus in class.	Fall	74%	26%	0%	0%	3.74	+0.17
	Spring	91%	9%	0%	0%	3.91	
Student demonstrates independent learning.	Fall	74%	26%	0%	0%	3.74	+0.17
	Spring	91%	9%	0%	0%	3.91	
The student brings all required materials (method book, instrument, etc.) to the group lesson.	Fall	65%	35%	0%	0%	3.65	+0.13
	Spring	79%	22%	0%	0%	3.78	
Student persists on tasks even when experiencing difficulty.	Fall	91%	9%	0%	0%	3.91	+0.09
	Spring	100%	0%	0%	0%	4.00	
The student demonstrates eagerness to learn.	Fall	91%	9%	0%	0%	3.91	+0.09
	Spring	100%	0%	0%	0%	4.00	
The student is cooperative in a group setting.	Fall	96%	4%	0%	0%	3.96	+0.04
	Spring	100%	0%	0%	0%	4.00	
The student follows directions in the lesson.	Fall	100%	0%	0%	0%	4.00	+0.0
	Spring	100%	0%	0%	0%	4.00	

Note: Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding

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MNYO Progress Report | Completed by Music Instructor

Student's name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Student studies:

- ¹ Violin
 ² Viola
 ³ Cello
 ⁴ Bass
 ⁵ Percussion
 ⁶ Brass
 ⁶ Woodwind
⁷ Other, please describe: _____

Attendance:

Student attended _____ out of _____ MNYO rehearsals.

Please rate the student's preparation for and behavior during class.

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never	Not applicable
1. Student brings all required materials (method book, instrument, etc.) to the group lesson.	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁹
2. Student prepares assigned music outside of MNYO rehearsals.	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁹
3. Student is cooperative in a group setting.	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁹
4. Student follows directions in rehearsal.	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁹
5. Student demonstrates eagerness to learn.	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁹
6. Student demonstrates focus in rehearsal.	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁹
7. Student has shown consistent musical progress and growth. Please describe:	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁹
8. Student persists on tasks even when experiencing difficulty.	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁹
9. Student demonstrates leadership in rehearsal.	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁹
10. Student demonstrates independent learning.	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁹

Please comment on the student's ability to participate in the online setting (ex: ability to focus, technical abilities, ability to receive feedback and instruction, etc.)

Additional teacher comments:

MNYO – Student Interview

Thank you for taking the time to do this interview with us. For extra background, Wilder Research is partnering with MacPhail to talk to students about their experiences with MNYO. We are interested in learning about the benefits and challenges of the program and ideas for improvement. This will help MacPhail continue to grow and develop MNYO.

This interview should take about 15-30 minutes, depending on how much you have to share. It is voluntary and confidential. Your responses will be aggregated with others we talk to and no identifiable information will be included in our final report; we'll just be sharing some high-level themes and quotations from interviews, but we'll make sure that all quotations are de-identified and can't be tied back to those we interview. There are no right or wrong answers. We want to hear your honest opinions and thoughts. **As a thank you for your time, we will send you a \$20 gift card to Amazon or Target.**

Any questions before we get started?

Are you comfortable with being recorded for this conversation? It is just for taking notes and will be deleted after notes are cleaned.

1. Icebreaker: What instrument do you play, and how many years have you been in MNYO?
2. Why were you originally interested in joining MNYO?
3. In general, what have been your favorite parts of MNYO?
 - a. What's a favorite piece or song you've done over the years? Why?
 - b. What has kept you coming back to MNYO over the years?
4. What do you think you have learned from being in MNYO?
 - a. What musical benefits have you experienced through MNYO?
 - b. Have you experienced any other benefits from participating in MNYO? *Probe as needed: academic, social, etc.*
5. What role do you expect music plays in your life long-term?
 - a. [If needed] Do you think you will continue to play after you've graduated?
6. Have there been any parts of MNYO that you didn't like or were challenging?
 - a. If you could change one thing about MNYO, what would it be?

7. What, if any, additional resources or support would you like MacPhail to provide to MNYO students?
8. Do you have any other thoughts or feedback about MNYO?

[Gift card info - \$20 gift card to Amazon, Target, or Walmart]

Thank you for your time today!

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Wilder Research, a division of Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, is a nationally respected nonprofit research and evaluation group. For more than 100 years, Wilder Research has gathered and interpreted facts and trends to help families and communities thrive, get at the core of community concerns, and uncover issues that are overlooked or poorly understood.

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