

EQUITY IN AUDITIONS:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE ALASKA ALL-STATE CHORAL SELECTION PROCEDURES

By

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## ABSTRACT

This document aims to enhance the geographic representation of selected participants within the Alaska All-State choirs by introducing novel audition, assessment, and selection procedures that welcome a wider array of musical aesthetics for musicians. Current musicianship and tonal quality markers in the audition and assessment unintentionally marginalize the musical contributions of musicians with cultural backgrounds that engage in qualities outside the current criterion. Furthermore, existing processes and policies favor a Western-centric music education that provides an inherent advantage for musicians in communities with access to this type of music education. This paper discusses implementing procedures to assess style and the ability to communicate musical intent to address these challenges. Additionally, it suggests modifying the selection process by ranking musicians with similar musical experience opportunities and educational access.

Present procedures within the Alaska All-State Choral Festival overlook young musicians' diverse educational and cultural experiences, particularly those living in rural Alaska. By fostering dialogue and implementing these proposed changes in Alaska and considering how these processes can be adapted for other state, regional, and national honor choirs we can move forward toward All-State Choirs becoming *all state* choirs.

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## Chapter I

### Music for All

Choral music leaders have embarked on a journey to increase diverse representation in the choirs of America. Major national leadership organizations accept the charge of improving musical opportunities for all students by fostering the most inclusive policies possible. For example, the National Association for Music Educators (NAfME) mission statement is, “to advance music education by promoting the understanding and making of music by all.”<sup>1</sup> NAfME has a vision to “(lead) the world in music education, empowering generations to create, perform, and respond to music.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the mission of the American Choral Director’s Association (ACDA) aims “to inspire excellence and nurture lifelong involvement in choral music for everyone through education, composition, and advocacy.”<sup>3</sup> Organizations like NAfME and ACDA are propelling the work being done to improve what it means for music to be experienced by all through increased representation. We see these goals being manifested in numerous ways: through historical research on underserved composers, in the advocacy of more diverse and inclusive repertoire, and in the academic discourse at state, regional, and national conference sessions.

Increasing diverse representation for selected participants within All-State choirs throughout the United States, however, remains an elusive goal. While designed to comprise the

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<sup>1</sup> National Association for Music Education-Strategic Plan. “Strategic Plan,” September 27, 2022. Accessed February 8, 2024. <https://nafme.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/NAfME-2022-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> National Association for Music Education-Strategic Plan.

<sup>3</sup> American Choral Directors Association. “About ACDA - American Choral Directors Association.” American Choral Directors Association - the Mission of ACDA Is to Inspire Excellence and Nurture Lifelong Involvement in Choral Music for Everyone Through Education, Performance, Composition and Advocacy., November 23, 2022. <https://acda.org/about-us#:~:text=The%20mission%20of%20ACDA%20is,%2C%20performance%2C%20composition%20and%20advocacy.>

leading high school singers from a state's population, All-State choirs resemble more closely populations of economically developed areas of a given state rather than the "all-state" demographics that the name invokes. Students from the state's largest cities are immersed in the educational resources and social and economic advantages required to navigate the audition process successfully. Many students from rural regions, however, lack the resources, education, and opportunities that assist in the preparation for access to these types of honor choirs, contributing to the overrepresentation of selected participants from urban and suburban communities.

Little has been written to identify ways to improve musician representation in All-State Choirs. Published writings that discuss how to best prepare students for auditions and the examination of audition material content are plentiful, but it is time to include updating the audition, assessment, and selection procedures for honors choirs in the journey of improving representation in the choirs of America. While not directly linked to the audition, assessment, and selection process, the National Association for Music Educators Association has acknowledged that socioeconomic status impacts participation in the All-National Honor Ensembles. In 2022, NAFME announced they would be pausing the 2023-2024 All-National Honor Ensemble program to review issues surrounding equity and access for participating musicians.

The NAFME National Executive Board has reviewed and discussed the financial sustainability and inherent challenges to equity and access that are intrinsic to the All-National Honor Ensembles (ANHE) experience and the association's mission and vision. To continue to review and address these issues, the National Executive Board has decided to pause the program for the 2023-2024 school year.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> NAFME. "NAfME All-National Honor Ensembles - NAFME," December 7, 2022. <https://nafme.org/programs/all-national-honor-ensembles/>.

This document aims to offer ways to improve musician representation within the Alaska All-State Choirs by introducing a new audition, assessment, and selection process aimed at reducing implicit audition bias and improving participation in areas outside of the city centers of Alaska. Several challenges contribute to the limited representation within the All-State Choirs of Alaska. The audition and assessment processes amplify a more traditional music education, providing an inherent advantage for musicians in communities that provide a Western-centric approach to music education. In Charles Fuller's dissertation published in 1989, he found that total enrollment in a singer's school choral program and previous audition experience were the two strongest predictors of success in regional and state honor choirs in Texas suggesting that students without these experiences may be less likely to experience the joys of participation, regardless of the musicianship.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the markers of musicianship supported through the current audition and assessment process unintentionally negate musical aesthetics outside of the Western scope of musics, severely limiting musicians from cultural backgrounds that engage in musical qualities outside of what is currently being promoted in the audition and assessment. And, while this document will not formally address this challenge, the cost to submit an audition application and attend these festivals deters musicians in low socioeconomic environments from participating, regardless of personal desire and if their skills likely satisfy the audition requirements, ultimately elevating students with the financial privilege to be selected.

I chose to examine the state of Alaska from my personal experience in teaching at three public schools in Anchorage. I witnessed the impact the present audition procedures had on

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<sup>5</sup> Fuller, Charles. "Factors Related to Success at All-Region and All-State Choir Auditions in Texas." Dissertation, Arizona State University, 1989.



students that didn't fit the mold of the "highest standard(s) of musicianship."<sup>6</sup> The Alaskan Native, Polynesian, Black, and Asian musicians that I taught were unintentionally encouraged to discard their musical and cultural identities to be able to fit standards that did not welcome their unique and beautiful musical contributions.

I also chose to survey the Alaska All-State Choirs because of its expansive geographic area, which presents exceptional challenges in terms of exploring equitable and inclusive all-state audition procedures. As the largest state in the country and yet, one of the least populous, Alaska is an ideal place to examine ways to best accommodate the geographic challenges of participating in the All-State choir, and better recognize how the audition and assessment procedures can be modified given the extreme disparity of resources, cultural influence, and educational accessibility in such a vast state.

A significant disproportion between selected students from Alaska's city centers and selected students from rural areas exists in the All-State choral ensembles. In 2022, 82% of the choral participants lived in the city centers of the Anchorage Municipality, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Kenai Peninsula Borough, and Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Of that, 35% reside in Anchorage, 21% from the Matanuska-Susitna Valley including Wasilla and Palmer, 15% from the Kenai region, and 11% from Fairbanks.<sup>7</sup> Selected participants in the choirs living outside these city centers were minimal or non-existent, with musicians from Alaska's most rural communities accounting for 1% of the two All-State choral ensembles. While population density does play a factor in these percentages, recognizing how current audition and assessment

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<sup>6</sup> This is taken from the mission statement for the Alaska-All State Festival and will be further discussed in subsequent chapters. Alaska Schools and Activities Association, 2022-2023 Music Handbook. <https://asaa.org/wp-content/uploads/handbook/music/complete/2023-24-Music-Handbook.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> 2022 ASAA/First National Bank Alaska All-State Music Festival Program. <http://asaa.org/wp-content/uploads/programs/2022-All-State-Music-Festival-Program.pdf>.

procedures may be limiting more expansive audition submissions and participation, and examining ways to improve these procedures to amplify the musical abilities of all students (rural, suburban, and urban) enhances the potential for more students to participate in the All-State choirs.

The content assessed in the Alaska All-State audition places value on specific musical qualities to determine a student's musicianship, which includes intonation, musicality, and tone quality. These qualities and how they are assessed conflict with Alaskan musicians' diverse cultural and social upbringings, placing a hierarchy of musical values that do not welcome the musicians. John Perkins, a choral educator with experience teaching abroad and in the United States, touches on this concept in his article, "What is written on our choral welcome mats?" Reflecting upon his experience auditioning students for his choirs while teaching abroad, he stated, "My culturally narrow entrance criteria conflicted with (my students') cultural upbringing-both musically and socially. More simply, what I considered 'good' was not the same "good" that (my students) valued before entering the audition."<sup>8</sup> The question then becomes, what characteristics are valued in determining the "best" musicians, and as a follow-up, who are the American All-State choirs serving?

Participating in All-State Choral ensembles offers enriching and unforgettable experiences that can play a pivotal role in inspiring young musicians to pursue their passion for music beyond high school through continued musical study and involvement. Singing in All-State and honor choirs provides a joyful opportunity for collaboration, community building, and music education and provides a meaningful experience for America's young musicians. In response to why singers should participate in these honor choirs, Barbara Walker explains,

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<sup>8</sup> Perkins, John. "What Is Written on Our Choral Welcome Mats?" *The Choral Journal* 59, no. 5 (December 2018): 28–40. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26662695>.

“Students need an opportunity to work with successful, professional choral educators with whom they are unfamiliar. They need to see new conducting styles. These experiences are essential for students to grow musically in directions that a single program alone cannot provide.”<sup>9</sup> It is likely the first time these students witness and participate in a grandiose choral music experience, opening their eyes to the limitless ways to continue participating in choral music.

All-State choirs are inspiring and can be a life-changing experience for participating musicians. In recognizing the influence participating in an All-State Choir has on its musicians and applying the knowledge of which students these choirs predominately represent, it should not be that surprising that our choral leaders and educators are also a product of unequal representation.<sup>10</sup>

Current audition, assessment, and selection procedures within the Alaskan All-State Choral Festival negate the vastly different educational and cultural experiences of young musicians in Alaska and promote a traditional music education that is not accessible or practical for all music students, particularly those living in rural Alaska. By presenting a novel audition, assessment, and selection procedure designed to assess and welcome musicians with differing educational backgrounds with the goal of implementation, the Alaska All-State Choirs can move forward toward being *all state* choirs.

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<sup>9</sup> Walker, Barbara. “Honor Choirs.” *The Choral Journal* 59, no. 11 (July 2019): 18-27. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26662774>.

<sup>10</sup> Enhancing diverse representation and fostering equity and inclusion in the choirs of America is an ongoing journey, supported by national organizations such as NAFME and ACDA. By embracing systematic changes from a grassroots, or bottom-top perspective, we can cultivate a more inclusive environment for our young musicians while also laying the groundwork for lasting benefits to help shape the future leaders of choral music in America.

## Chapter II

### Alaska All-State Eligibility, Audition and Assessment Procedures, and Participation Data

Most all-state music ensemble festivals in the United States are sponsored and coordinated by their respective state's music association. While the Alaska Music Educators Association remains active, low membership and limited resources make organizing large-scale festivals impractical.<sup>11</sup> An Alaskan chapter of the American Choral Director's Association has also previously existed, though it appears the chapter is no longer active.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the responsibility for sponsoring and overseeing regional and state music festivals in Alaska lies with the Alaska School Activities Association (ASAA). Despite strong administrative support from ASAA, planning, overseeing, and managing the details of the Alaska All-State Festival and all additional state-sponsored music activities falls upon two individuals. It is also worth noting that before 2023, a single music coordinator was responsible for organizing the music festivals for the entire state. Beginning in the 2023-2024 school year, a second music coordinator was hired to assist in the administrative responsibilities of statewide music festivals.

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<sup>11</sup> Based on the Alaska Music Educators Association website, there are currently 8 vacant seats on the AMEA Board and Regional Representatives. An AMEA Conference was held in Fairbanks on January 12-13. It involved interest sessions only with one band and three choral performances. It is unknown how these ensembles were chosen.

<sup>12</sup> The chapter continues to accept new membership but does not engage in regular meetings or sponsor any conference or outreach opportunities. There are currently 16 members in the Alaska ACDA Chapter.

### **Alaska All-State Eligibility Requirements<sup>13</sup>**

ASAA is responsible for all regional and state activities, including sports in Alaska, and as a result, has established specific eligibility criteria for students wishing to participate in any ASSA-sanctioned event. For the All-State Music Festival, these eligibility requirements extend beyond the initial audition process, which includes obtaining written parental consent, completing a code of conduct form, having completed the previous semester with a minimum of 2.5 credits while also being enrolled in grades 9-12 with a minimum of 2.5 credits, and maintaining a minimum 2.0 GPA. Students must also be enrolled in a performance-focused course within their school's music program or participate in a performance class where academic credit is offered through the school. Notably, ASAA will waive this requirement if a student's school does not provide a performance-based class to ensure that all students, regardless of their school's size or course offerings, are eligible to audition for the festival.

### **Alaska All-State Audition Procedures<sup>14</sup>**

The Alaska All-State audition process is formatted to be a completely online process. Geographic expansiveness with minimal infrastructure makes hosting live regional auditions impractical. While certainly not a perfect solution, online auditions offer increased accessibility instead of live auditions. It is worth noting, however, that in 2020, a reported 31% of Alaskan high school students were without home internet access, and 19% were without devices.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Alaska Schools and Activities Association, 2022-2023 Music Handbook. <https://asaa.org/wp-content/uploads/handbook/music/complete/2023-24-Music-Handbook.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Alaska Schools and Activities Association, 2022-2023 Music Handbook.

<sup>15</sup> Tibken, Shara. "In Remote Alaska, Broadband for All Remains a Dream. So a School District Got Creative." CNET, August 27, 2020. <https://www.cnet.com/home/internet/in-remote-alaska-broadband-for-all-remains-a-dream-so-a-school-got-creative/>.

Students are encouraged but not required to record audition materials with their music teachers to allow for support in the recording process and reduce user error. Audition materials are available before the submission time frame to allow ample preparation time, and ASAA hopes that music teachers support their musicians through the audition preparation process. Though teacher participation varies widely, a correlation between teacher involvement and the number of students from a respective school submitting auditions does appear to exist. There are no limitations to the number of attempts before being required to submit a recording, giving students working with their teachers an inherent advantage as compared to students recording their auditions at home.

Specific parameters for each recorded track have been set to promote objectivity for recorded auditions.<sup>16</sup> Each recorded track must have the starting pitch played before the student performs the audition content unaccompanied. Before 2023, disqualifications would occur if the incorrect pitch was played, if the student hummed or sang the starting pitch before performing the audition material, or if they sang with assistance from any additional instrument. Newly implemented in the 2023 choral auditions, students now receive zero points instead of disqualification if the incorrect pitch is played, causing the musician to sing the exercise in the wrong key or if the musician sings the incorrect exercise. Humming or singing the starting pitch before beginning the exercise remains grounds for disqualification, as does singing with pitch assistance; however, since submitted auditions ask for audio-only files, identifying students utilizing this aid is impossible.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The term “track” is utilized by ASAA to denote the individual exercises for the All-State audition.

<sup>17</sup> Alaska Schools and Activities Association, 2022-2023 Music Handbook. <https://asaa.org/wp-content/uploads/handbook/music/complete/2023-24-Music-Handbook.pdf>.

Alaska's All-State audition contents are adapted from the National Association for Music Educators (NAfME) All-Northwest Choral Ensemble Audition, held biennially in Washington or Oregon. The decision to utilize the same material was made to lessen the burden of Alaskan students and teachers preparing two different auditions within the same time frame. ASAA implements an independent policy where students can submit up to two different voice part auditions for the All-State Festival. The NAfME All-Northwest Choir auditions and Alaska All-State auditions have submission deadlines in November, within weeks of each other. Auditions for the NAfME choirs include six tracks: two major scales, a chromatic exercise, performing a 16-bar short song entitled, *Winter Song*, part singing within a chorale, and a four-measure sight-singing exercise.<sup>18</sup> Of those tracks, ASAA adopted the two major scales, chromatic exercise, and *Winter Song* to comprise their all-state audition, excluding the part singing exercise and four-measure sight-singing exercise.

Figures 1 and 2 below show the nature of each track and are what students and teachers reference in preparation for submitting an audition. Key centers for each vocal part were determined by NAfME to ascertain better vocal tessitura and range for each specific voice part.

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<sup>18</sup> NAfME Auditions, <https://nafmenw.org/>.

Figure 1: First 3 Tracks of the Soprano 1 Alaska All-State Choral Audition

Track 1: Major Scale

do re mi fa so la ti do do ti la so fa mi re do

Track 2: Major Scale

do re mi fa so la ti do do ti la so fa mi re do

Track 3: Chromatic Scale - *sing using solfege or on a single syllable, for example- doo, dee, dah, etc.*

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Tracks 1 and 2 consist of the two major scales that are designed to assess each musician's ability to maintain consistent intonation in their lower and upper tessitura. The third track, the chromatic scale, is predominately utilized to assess a musician's ability to maintain intonation with half-step intervals.



Figure 2: Track 4 of the Alaska All-State Audition for Soprano 1

**Winter Song**

Soprano I

$\text{♩} = 72$

When dew in the meadow turns to frost, silvery field of diamonds, And  
leaves take wing on currents tossed to wind-swept mountain sides. I  
feel the call of winter song, even as fall abides. A  
song of winter warms my heart 'til spring again presides.

Track 4, *Winter Song*, is a 16-measure melody sung in English that assesses the ability to show consistent intonation, rhythmic and melodic accuracy, diction, phrasing, and musicality.

### Alaska All-State Assessment Procedures<sup>19</sup>

Similar to the audition submission process, assessments are also conducted online, allowing ASAA coordinators to hire adjudicators living in all states. No training is required to be an all-state vocal judge, and adjudicators receive minimal guidelines for the assessment process. Adjudicators have access to the ASAA Music Handbook, which offers evaluative guidelines; however, accessing the information is difficult as the length of the handbook proves to be

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<sup>19</sup> Alaska Schools and Activities Association, 2022-2023 Music Handbook. <https://asaa.org/wp-content/uploads/handbook/music/complete/2023-24-Music-Handbook.pdf>.

overwhelming when searching for specific information. Scores are tabulated for each audition and then ranked to determine the selected members of each All-State Choir.

Prior to the 2023 All-State assessment process, the following rubric was utilized for each recorded audition.

Figure 3: All-State Choir Adjudication Form

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## ALL-STATE CHOIR ADJUDICATION FORM

All exercises are to be sung a cappella (without instrument).  
The pitch should be given only once before each exercise and must be heard on the audition.

**SCORING INSTRUCTIONS** - Grade each exercise using a scale of 1 to 20/25/30/60 with 1 = lowest and 20/25/30/60 = perfection. Score with whole points and half (.5) points only. Total the score for each exercise, and then total all the exercises combined. Total maximum points = 130.

**ADJUDICATION CRITERIA SHALL BE:**

**PITCH:** Correct Intonation      **MUSICALITY:** a) Legato line, b) phrasing, c) dynamics and d) steady tempo

**Student No.**       **Voice (check one)**

Soprano  I  II    Alto  I  II    Tenor  I  II    Bass  I  II

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**EXERCISE #1 - LOW SCALE:**

Quarter note = m.m. 72 (1-20 points possible). Deduct 1 point for each degree of scale out-of-pitch. Students may or may not repeat the "DO" at the top of the scale.  
Circle out of pitch notes: DO RE MI FA SO LA TI DO  
DO TI LA SO FA MI RE DO

<b>PITCH</b> (15 points possible) <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<b>MUSICALITY</b> (2 points possible) <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<b>TONE QUALITY</b> (3 points possible) <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<b>EXERCISE #1</b> <b>Total Points</b> (copy to page 2) <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/> <b>20 pts possible</b>
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**EXERCISE #2 - HIGH SCALE:**

Quarter note = m.m. 72 (1-20 points possible). Deduct 1 point for each degree of scale out-of-pitch. Students may or may not repeat the "DO" at the top of the scale.  
Circle out of pitch notes: DO RE MI FA SO LA TI DO  
DO TI LA SO FA MI RE DO

<b>PITCH</b> (15 points possible) <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<b>MUSICALITY</b> (2 points possible) <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<b>TONE QUALITY</b> (3 points possible) <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<b>EXERCISE #2</b> <b>Total Points</b> (copy to page 2) <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/> <b>20 pts possible</b>
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**EXERCISE #3 - CHROMATIC SCALE:**

Beginning on the first note, sing the CHROMATIC SCALE exercise upward in half steps to the octave.

Take a breath.

Then sing the CHROMATIC SCALE exercise downward in half steps.

You may use solfege or a single syllable.

This exercise will encompass a total of 13 different pitches upward, a breath, then a total of 13 different pitches downward.

	<b>EXERCISE #3</b> <b>Total Points</b> (copy to page 2) <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/> <b>30 pts possi-</b>
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Figure 3 (Continued)



# ALL-STATE CHOIR ADJUDICATION FORM

Page 2 of 2

**CONTINUED**

**Student No.**

**EXERCISE #1  
Total Points**  
 **20 pts possible**

**EXERCISE #2  
Total Points**  
 **20 pts possible**

**EXERCISE #3  
Total Points**  
 **30 pts possible**

Copy exercise scores from page 1

**EXERCISE #4 – WINTER SONG**

**A. Intonation.** (0-20 points possible). No set tempo. Five (5) intonation points are possible for each 4-measure phrase. Identify strengths and problem areas. In 4/4.

When / dew in the meadow / turns to frost, / silv'ry feild of / diamonds. And / (5 pts) \_\_\_\_\_

/ Leaves take wing on / currents tossed to / wind-swept moun - tain / sides. I / (5 pts) \_\_\_\_\_

/ feel the call of / win - ter song / e - ven as fall a - / bides. A / (5 pts) \_\_\_\_\_

/ song of win - ter / warms my heart 'til / spring a - gain pre - / sides. // (5 pts) \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Rhythm.** (0-15 points possible). Add up to 15 points for accurate rhythm. (15 pts) \_\_\_\_\_

**C. Musicality.** (0-10 points possible). Add up to 10 points for musicality. (10 pts) \_\_\_\_\_  
In addition to the musicality criteria outlined on the first page, also consider diction and classical style of singing.

**EXERCISE #4  
Total Points**

**60 pts possible**

**D. Tone quality.** (0-15 points possible). Add up to 15 points for tone quality. (15 pts) \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL OF ALL FOUR EXERCISES COMBINED**

130 pts possible

**Adjudicator's Comments**

**Adjudicator's Signature**

Atop Figure 3 under Scoring Instructions, pitch is defined as correct intonation, and musicality is defined as singing with a legato line, phrasing, dynamics, and steady tempo. In tracks 1 and 2 (the major scale examples), adjudicators are asked to provide a composite score of up to 20 based on pitch (15 points), musicality (2 points), and tone (3 points). The rubric does not provide information on how best to assess tone quality. Track 3, the chromatic exercise, does not specify how to allocate the 30 points.<sup>20</sup> Track 4, “Winter Song,” offers the possible points of up to 40 for intonation, rhythm, musicality, and tone quality. The provided rubric offers the most specific information for track 4. Each phrase of the song earns a student of up to 5 points for intonation, and judges are permitted to allocate up to 15 points for rhythmic accuracy. Ten points are possible for overall musicality, including the criteria listed at the top of the assessment rubric, with added diction and a classical singing style. Further explanation of what a classical style of singing entails is not provided in the rubric or the ASAA Handbook. The last criterion for the Track 4 assessment is tone quality, which offers up to 15 points. Like tracks 1 and 2, information on what tone quality to listen for is not provided. Labeling musical attributes that are identified as key elements of a classical style of singing in the musicality parameter and offering no guidance as to how best to assess tone are the primary proponents of an audition and assessment process that does not welcome the diverse musical aesthetics of Alaskan musicians. A comments section exists in the final section of the rubric, which offers adjudicators the opportunity to provide written feedback for each student.

Regarding assessment, a novel format was introduced and implemented for the 2023 Alaska All-State Audition with the website - *Opus Events* to offer a more time-efficient manner for adjudicators to hear and score auditions. This year, I adjudicated auditions for Soprano 1

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<sup>20</sup> Presumably, 1 point is allocated for each of the 26 sung pitches for intonation, and then the other 4 points can be allocated for musicality and/or tone quality.

musicians and documented a 50% reduction in time spent assessing due to the new website format. The previous rubric referenced above in Figure 3 continues to be the framework for scoring instructions but is no longer the official assessment form. Instead, adjudicators now utilize this format for scoring and comments:

Figure 4: The Assessment Form for Tracks 1 and 2

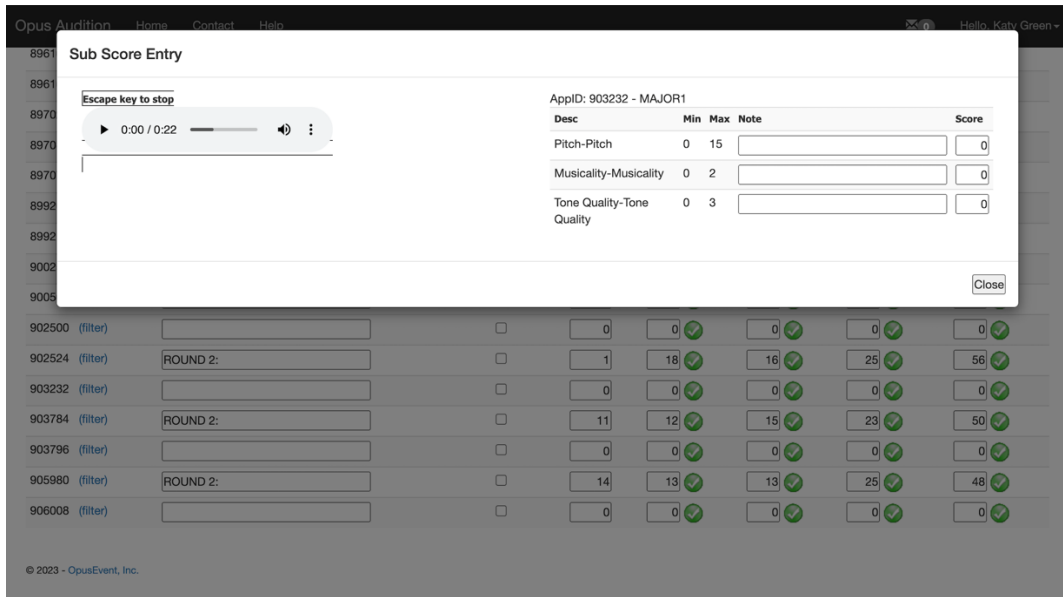


Figure 5: The Assessment Form for Track 3:

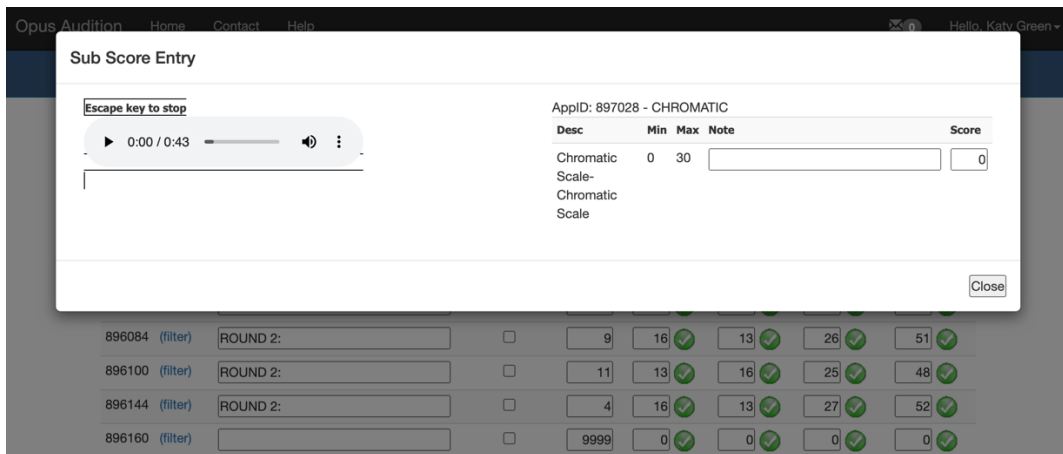
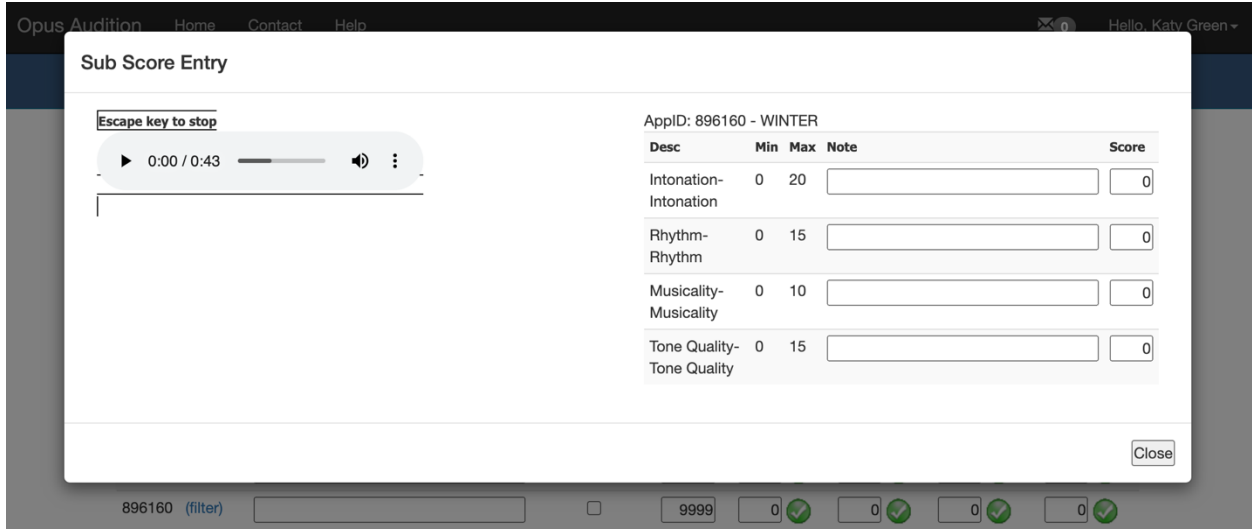


Figure 6: The Assessment Form for Track 4



As a frequent adjudicator, I can appreciate the time saved with this new format. However, with fewer written parameters to reference during the assessment process, the potential for subjective or uninformed criticism is even greater.

### Alaska All-State Selection Procedures

After adjudicating all submitted auditions, musicians are ranked in score order for each voice part. The Alaska Schools Activities Association has divided Alaska into 6 different regions. However, unlike in ASAA-sponsored sporting events, there are no regional considerations in the ranking and selection process for the All-State Festival. Rankings are completed by total audition score only. If a musician has auditioned for two voice parts and is selected to participate in both voice parts, the musician is contacted and given the choice of which voice part they would like to sing in the ensemble. In the event of a tie that impacts a student's selection status, ASAA has adopted a policy to include those musicians, even if that

means the total number of selected musicians is slightly higher than the recommended number of 175.

ASAA recommends the following numbers for each choir.

	Treble Choir-86	Mixed Choir-87
Soprano 1	20	10
Soprano 2	22	11
Alto 1	21	10
Alto 2	23	11
Tenor 1	N/A	10
Tenor 2	N/A	11
Bass 1	N/A	11
Bass 2	N/A	13 <sup>21</sup>

For treble voices, the top-ranked musicians alternate between the treble and mixed choruses at a 2 to 1 ratio. For example: In one year, the top-ranked Alto 1 audition would go to the mixed choir, and the second and third-ranked Alto 1's would go to the treble choir, and so on. The next year, the top and second-ranked Alto 1 audition would go to the treble choir, and the third-ranked Alto 1 audition would go to the mixed, and so on. ASAA also selects between 3-5 alternates in each of the four larger voice parts: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass if a selected musician cannot participate in the festival.

### **Alaska All-State Participation Data**

Approximately 175 students are selected to participate in the two All-State Choirs of Alaska: mixed (SATB) and treble (SSAA). On average, ASAA receives between 350-500 auditions per year. Given that students can submit 2 auditions, it is unknown how many individuals on average submit auditions per year. However, based on the data collected from the

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<sup>21</sup> Alaska Schools and Activities Association, 2022-2023 Music Handbook. <https://asaa.org/wp-content/uploads/handbook/music/complete/2023-24-Music-Handbook.pdf>.

2021 audition submissions, it is likely safe to assume that a large percentage of total auditions are from students submitting two auditions.

Year	Total Auditions Submitted	Students Submitting 2 Auditions	Total individual Students	Percentage of Treble Voice Selection	Percentage of Tenor/Bass Voice Selection
2021	388	171 (44%)	217	43%	49.50%
2022	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
2023	459	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

22

Geographic data collected from the 2022 and 2023 All-State Festival shows that a remarkable percentage of participating musicians reside from the state’s most populous areas in Alaska.

Alaska's Most Populous Geographic Areas	Population	2022 All-State Percentage	2023 All-State Percentage
Anchorage Municipality	291,247	82%	85.20%
Matanuska-Susitna Borough (Wasilla and Palmer)	107,081		
Fairbanks North Star Borough	95,655		
Kenai Peninsula Borough (Homer, Kenai, Seward)	58,799		

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<sup>22</sup> Data collected by ASAA Music Coordinator, Cam Bohman and distributed to Alaska’s high school music teachers.

<sup>23</sup> 2020 Census. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/alaska-population-change-between-census-decade.html>.



The communities of Southeast Alaska often have several participants. Ketchikan and Petersburg did not have selected participants for the 2023 All-State Choirs. Despite the higher population of these communities, it is my opinion that the considerable travel (accessible by airplane only) and expense to attend the All-State Festival deters more auditions and participants from Southeast Alaska.

Southeast Alaskan Communities	Population	2022 All-State Percentage	2023 All-State Percentage
Sitka City and Borough	8,458	9.10%	5%
Juneau City and Borough	32,255		
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	13,948		
Petersburg Borough	3,398		

24

The term “rural Alaska” denotes areas with a population of between 210 and 2,500 residents. Skagway and Cantwell were not represented in 2023 and Healy was not represented in 2022.

Rural Alaskan Communities	Population	2022 All-State Percentage	2023 All-State Percentage
Nenana	358	6.80%	6.70%
Haines Borough	1,905		
Skagway Municipality	1,191		
Cantwell	210		
Cordova	2,528		
Wrangell City and Borough	2,055		
Healy	1,096		

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<sup>24</sup> 2020 Census. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/alaska-population-change-between-census-decade.html>

<sup>25</sup> 2020 Census.

The All-State Choirs also saw musicians from other larger, but remote communities.

Larger, but Remote Alaskan Communities	Population	2022 All-State Percentage	2023 All-State Percentage
Valdez	3,985	1.10%	2.20%
Nikiski	4,456		
Kodiak Island Borough	13,101		

<sup>26</sup>

Looking at the selection data for all the represented communities in the 2022 and 2023 Alaska All-State Choirs, a large portion of the participants are musicians from Anchorage, which is also where the All-State Festival is held every year.

Year	Total Participants	Anchorage Participants	Matanuska-Susitna Valley Participants	Kenai Peninsula Borough Participants	Fairbanks Participants	Southeast Participants	Rural Participants	Other: Valdez, Kodiak, Nikiski Participants	Unknown
2022	175	62 (35.4%)	37 (21.1%)	26 (14.8%)	20 (11.4%)	16 (9.1%)	12 (6.8%)	2 (1.1%)	N/A
2023	178	83 (46.6%)	29 (16.2%)	21 (11.7%)	19 (10.6%)	6 (5%)	12 (6.7%)	4 (2.2%)	1 (.5%)

<sup>27</sup>

### Audition Submission Data

Information regarding the location of Alaskan musicians who submitted auditions in 2023 was made available for this document.

<sup>26</sup> 2020 Census. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/alaska-population-change-between-census-decade.html>

<sup>27</sup> Data collected from 2021 and 2021 ASAA/First National Bank All-State Music Festival Programs

Anchorage Auditions	Matanuska-Susitna Valley Auditions	Fairbanks Auditions	Rural Auditions <sup>28</sup>	Kenai Peninsula Borough Auditions	Southeast Auditions
194 (42.4%)	85 (18.5%)	60 (13%)	54 (11.7%)	44 (9.5%)	22 (4.7%)

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Unfortunately, this similar data for the 2021 and 2022 auditionees is unavailable. While this data remains primarily consistent with the data of selected participants based on geography, a surprising discovery reveals that the rural and less populated areas of Alaska submitted more audition submissions than the Kenai Peninsula Borough and in the areas of Southeast Alaska.

Nearly all schools that had musicians submit auditions in 2023 had at least one musician make the All-State Choirs. However, except for one school in Juneau with five auditions and another in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley with seven, the remaining schools that submitted auditions but did not have selected participants were from smaller, rural communities.

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<sup>28</sup> The communities in this category include Nenana, Haines, Cordova, Petersburg, Wrangell, Valdez, Bethel (6.270), Utqiagvik (4.383), Healy, Nikiski, and Kodiak.

<sup>29</sup> Data collected from *Opus Events*

Community Name	2023 Auditions	2023 Selected Participants	2022 Selected Participants
Ketchikan	2	0	3
Utqiagvik	1	0	0
Bethel	1	0	0
Petersburg	1	0	1
Thunder-Mountain (Juneau)	5	0	4
Houston (Mat-Su)	7	0	1
Skagway	0	0	1
Cantwell	0	0	1
Healy	11	2	0
Nikiski	6	2	0
Kodiak	4	1	0
Unalakleet (760)	0	0	0
Metlakatla (4,444)	0	0	0
Dillingham	0	0	0

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**Data Conclusions**

Acknowledging that population density plays a factor in these numbers is necessary in analyzing this data. One can expect more schools, teachers, and student enrollment in areas with a higher population. Unsurprisingly, more auditions and selected participants come from these areas of Alaska, particularly given the current selection process implemented by ASAA. What is interesting, however, is that justifying the disparity of geographic representation in the all-state choirs of Alaska as the result of minimal to no auditions submitted in the rural and less populated areas of Alaska can now be discredited. The information collected from the most recent 2023 All-State audition submissions revealed that the smaller and the rural regions of Alaska comprised 11.7% of total auditions submitted, more than auditions submitted from the Kenai

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<sup>30</sup> Data collected from *Opus Events* with permission from newly hired ASAA Music Coordinator, Barbara Carroll and from the 2022 and 2023 ASAA/First National Bank All State Music Festival Concert Programs

Peninsula Borough and the communities of Southeast Alaska. Yet rural Alaskan musicians were the least represented in the selected choral musicians for the 2023 and 2022 All-State Festival.

## Chapter III

### Re-defining the Highest Standards of Musicianship

Student musicians living outside of the areas of Anchorage Municipality, Matanuska-Susitna Valley, Kenai Peninsula Borough, and Fairbanks North Star Borough are underrepresented in the Alaska All-State Choirs. This is not the result of a lack of audition submissions, as we now know that in 2023, musicians living in rural areas of Alaska submitted more auditions than those living in the Kenai Peninsula Borough and Southeast Alaska. The underrepresentation of rural Alaskans in the All-State Choirs results from two primary issues. First, the existing audition and assessment fail to consider how cultural diversity impacts a musician's performance. Secondly, the advantage given to musicians engaged in a music education with ample resources that provide experiences such as concerts and travel widens the gap in skills emphasized by the current audition and assessment criteria. Alaskan students across the state lack uniformity in their access to music education methodologies. It is, therefore, inequitable to ask all Alaskan students who want to audition for the All-State Festival to undergo an assessment that does not consider and account for the disparity of cultural influence and educational opportunity surrounding the vast state of Alaska. Addressing these concerns is crucial to fostering a more inclusive representation of Alaskan musicians in the All-State choirs.

This is the current adopted mission statement by the Alaska All-State Music Festival Committee.

The existence of the ASAA/First National Bank Alaska All-State Music Festival enables outstanding high school musicians to participate as members of a select statewide band, choral, and orchestral music ensembles and promote the highest standards of musicianship. The goal of this activity is to foster and inspire technical achievement,

aesthetic understanding and critical listening skills that allow for the culmination of a final creative musical performance of the highest artistic level.”<sup>31</sup>

Three primary musical qualities are utilized to determine one’s musicianship in the audition process: pitch, tone quality, and musicality. Pitch is equated with intonation and refers to a musician’s ability to sing each prescribed note accurately and in tune. No information is provided in the rubric or audition materials to describe tone quality. In my experience as an adjudicator and in assisting my students submit auditions for this festival several times, the expectation is implicitly *bel canto*, reflected by a spacious, warm, rounded, and resonant tone quality. Musicality in the ASAA rubric is defined as singing with a legato line, phrasing, performing with dynamics, in a steady tempo, clear diction, and in a classical style.<sup>32</sup>

The implication of *bel canto* as the preferred tone quality and musicality assessment parameters unintentionally perpetuates existing cultural divisions between social classes and geographic areas and impacts individual and collective musical performances of Alaskan communities. The Oxford Dictionary of Music defines *bel canto* as, “beautiful singing, beautiful song. A term covering the remarkable qualities of the great 18<sup>th</sup>-cent. and early 19<sup>th</sup>-cent...Beauty of tone and legato phrasing, with faultless technique.”<sup>33</sup> The expectation of a tonal quality that narrows the diverse sound scope of young Alaskan vocalists that is neither documented nor explained in the audition materials and assessment rubric enhances the disadvantage of Alaskan students who are less likely to witness and practice a *bel canto* choral sound. It sends a message to rural musicians that their unique tonal contributions are not welcome in the All-State Choirs.

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31 “2023-2024 ASAA Music Handbook and Manual .” Alaska School Activities Association, September 20, 2023. <https://asaa.org/wp-content/uploads/handbook/music/complete/2023-24-Music-Handbook.pdf>.

32 2023-2024 ASAA Music Handbook.

33 Kennedy, Michael. The Oxford Dictionary of Music. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

It is time to consider the message auditions conducted in this manner may convey about the kinds of singers being welcomed to audition. Re-inventing the audition and assessment process centered on assessing a more comprehensive array of musical attributes, re-defining what the “highest standards of musicianship” can mean, improving the clarity of expectations for the audition and assessment, and considering geography and non-musical attributes amongst the factors within the assessment can improve the unintentional inequities present in the current Alaska All-State Choir audition, assessment, and selection process.

Accessing a universally accepted and concise definition of musicianship has proven to be complicated. Descriptive qualities of musicianship vary from person to person, making describing the “highest standards of musicianship” increasingly challenging. Frequent concepts of performance are included in the many definitions of musicianship referencing the “knowledge, skill, and artistic sensitivity in performing music”<sup>34</sup> and “a person’s skill in playing a musical instrument or singing.”<sup>35</sup> Alternatively, the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) focuses primarily on quantifiable skills to associate with musicianship. NASM states that musicianship attends to the development of reading and writing musical notation and the cultivation of the ability to hear, identify, and work conceptually with elements of music (rhythm, melody, harmony, structure, and texture.)<sup>36</sup> Another perspective prioritizes the individualized nature of musicianship. Judy Bowers, Professor Emerita of choral music education at Florida State University, describes musicianship as “the ability to make decisions or judgments that require foundational knowledge and higher-order thinking skills, or critical

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34 “Musicianship Definition & Usage Examples.” Dictionary.com. Accessed December 30, 2023. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/musicianship>.

35 “Musicianship Definition | Cambridge English Dictionary.” Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed March 16, 2024. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/musicianship>.

36 2022-2023 National Association of Schools of Music Handbook. Reston, Virginia: National Association of Schools of Music, 2023.



thought.”<sup>37</sup> Musicianship describes a musician’s ability to make performance decisions by transferring thought into musical action.<sup>38</sup> David Elliot argues musicianship is anchored inside the realm of one’s lived experiences. Developing musicianship is partly to advance a musician’s affective awareness of what “counts” in musical engagements as a balance of formal and informal knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

The awareness of what “counts” has assisted in formulating the content in standard audition procedures, including the musical qualities of intonation, musicality, and tone quality assessed in the Alaska All-State auditions. If we are to accept David Elliot’s claim of musicianship as being a product of one’s lived experiences, we find ourselves navigating conflicting terrain when we attempt to identify areas to describe the “highest standards of musicianship.” Structures determining musical proficiency undermine the richness of personal, cultural, and societal musical creativity within music-making. This challenge is further compounded when we seek to define a criterion or “hierarchy” of musical skills to assess when creating audition content and assessments. The legitimization and assumption of a hierarchy of qualities afforded by a formal, Western-centric music education narrows and de-emphasizes the definition of musicianship described by David Elliot. The community in which one lives influences the exposure and execution of musical fundamentals. What is valued, practiced, and performed musically in one geographic area is likely different than another. This is especially relevant when considering how cultural diversity and identity influence musical expression's value, style, and social context.

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37 Robinson, Matt. “Musicianship: Defining a Key Term for Future Teachers.” *Teaching Music* 17, no. 5 (February 2010): 60.

38 Robinson

39 Elliott, David J. 1995. *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education*. New York: Oxford University Press, 65.

The reality is that auditions have never been intended to be inclusive. While outdated statements, Edeson<sup>40</sup> and Curwen<sup>41</sup> both suggest the foundation of auditions is designed to define a specific identity within the choral ensemble space. Published choral method books dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century routinely recommended conducting auditions when formulating choral ensembles and often reflected a variety of opinions in terms of vocal and non-vocal considerations. Commonly discussed audition procedures include summative assessments of the vocal instrument to include quality, range, intonation, musicianship, and non-musical attributes such as professionalism and motivation.<sup>42</sup>

Of these three musical qualities in the Alaska All-State choral audition, intonation appears to be the most objective regarding assessment and musician comprehension. Evidence of pitch accuracy and pitch discrimination is often a primary focus in singing assessments. In their research, James Dougherty and Debra Gordon Hedden found that pitch accuracy was the primary focus and most important criterion for directors surveyed on audition procedures for 84 community children's choirs nationwide.<sup>43</sup> Dougherty and Hedden cite M.J.M. Howie's study, which examined patterns in seven different community children's choirs in Florida. This research documented that all seven choirs employed pitch accuracy and pitch discrimination to audition singers. It also noted that the children unable to match pitch were not selected as these choral ensembles did not offer educational experiences designed for insecure singers.<sup>44</sup> The

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40 Scott, Edeson. *The training of Catholic choirs; a short treatise for Choirmasters and Organists*. London: Cary & Co., 1934.

41 "Musicianship Definition & Usage Examples." *Dictionary.com*. Accessed December 30, 2023. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/musicianship>.

42 Dougherty, James F., and Debra Gordon Hedden. "Audition Procedures for Community-Based Children's Choirs." *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 167 (2006): 33–45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40319288>.

43 Dougherty, James F., and Debra Gordon Hedden

44 Howie, M. J. M. (1999). *Seven community children's choirs in Florida: Function in the community, organizational patterns, and conductors' theories and practices*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, 1999). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 60, 1954.

implementation of assessing pitch accuracy and discrimination can occur in various ways. Musicians can be asked to demonstrate triads, arpeggios, chromatic/atonal patterns, diatonic scales, modes, and entire melodies with or without accompaniment. An extension of pitch discrimination includes exercises to assess vocal range and tessitura, including modulating ascending and descending melodic passages or singing a familiar melody in multiple keys. This research supports the methods utilized in the current ASAA All-State audition to assess intonation.

The area of tone quality in the ASAA audition materials and rubric is arguably the least objective of the three musical qualities assessed, as no parameters are provided to assist in its judgment. Assessing tone or tone quality can be elusive, and like musicianship, it is often the result of individual preference, experiences, and/or culture. For example, language and language patterns in speech parallel music patterns in tone, thereby influencing tonal quality. Divided into tone and non-tone languages, unique attributes of tonal production highly affect the quality of spoken and sung sounds in individuals.<sup>45</sup> Cultural identity in music is represented in tone quality as a tool for stylistic and musical expression.

The 2020 Census revealed Alaska as being the 12<sup>th</sup> most diverse state with the following languages spoken as either primary or secondary: Spanish, Tagalog, Austronesian (Ilocano, Samoan, Hawaiian), Russian, Korean, Hmong, German, Tai-Kadai (Thai, Lao), French, Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese), Japanese, Vietnamese, Slavik (Ukrainian), English, and any of the 20

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45 Han, Shui'er, Janani Sundararajan, Daniel Liu Bowling, Jessica Lake, and Dale Purves. "Co-Variation of Tonality in the Music and Speech of Different Cultures." *PLoS ONE* 6, no. 5 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0020160>.

formalized Alaskan Native Languages.<sup>46</sup> Alaska is a remarkable place for cultural and linguistic diversity, reflected in the tone quality produced in speech and in the vocal musicians of the state. The quest for an “ideal choral sound” currently dictates the method of tonal assessment for selection in the All-State Choirs. Incorporating tonal quality as a selection criterion in auditions will likely result in the selection of musicians who exhibit similar tonal timbres.

A profound difference between solo singing and choral ensemble singing exists in choral blend and overall choral tone. The individual voice functions differently within an ensemble than as a solo instrument. Some may argue the concept of the choral sound is entirely reflective of the conductor. Howard Swan in *Choral Conducting: A Symposium* writes that, “Choral tone is dictated by (a) the conductor’s knowledge of the singing voice; (b) preference for blend, rhythm, phrasing, balance, dynamics, or pronunciation; (c) interpretation and style; and (d) the conductor’s ability of communicate.”<sup>47</sup> For style and interpretation, in particular, it is not uncommon for choirs to shift their choral tone production in response to the repertoire being performed. Versatility in the choral tone is one of the most unique and exciting aspects of choral performances. Why, then, should we not want to incorporate as many distinct individual tonal timbres as possible to accompany the diverse repertoire being programmed today?

Contemporary conductors address tonal blend through methods of acoustical singing, where musicians are positioned based on vocal compatibility to continue singing freely without utilizing pedagogical adjustments to achieve a homogeneous tone.<sup>48</sup> The acceptance and practice of this method and philosophy offer a more inclusive approach to the unique timbres and vocal

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46 “Alaska: 2020 Census.” Census.gov, July 17, 2023. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/alaska-population-change-between-census-decade.html>.

47 Decker, Harold A., Julius Herford, and Howard Swan. “The Development of a Choral Instrument.” Essay. In *Choral Conducting: A Symposium*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1973.

48 Ekholm, Elizabeth. “The Effect of Singing Mode and Seating Arrangement on Choral Blend and Overall Choral Sound.” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 48, no. 2 (2000): 123–35. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3345571>.

qualities of the musicians singing in a choral ensemble. Perhaps then, instead of placing a hierarchy of a singular-styled vocal timbre, we invite the vocal colors representative of the population to create a sound uniquely associated with one's respective state. Assessment of vocal tone could shift to a singer's ability to perform in a multitude of styles or aim to highlight unique individual attributes that contribute to an organic ensemble tonal quality that is then ideally represented in the chosen repertoire by the conductor leading these All-State choirs. Perhaps this is one way of introducing and maintaining practices of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging for all musicians amid an art form that deliberately aims to create a sound where individual voices are imperceptible.

The last of the three musical skills currently assessed in the Alaska All-State auditions is musicality. While some parameters exist in assessing this musical quality in the rubric, like musicianship and tone, one's comprehension and understanding of musicality remains subjective and often interpreted based on individual preference and one's musical upbringing. It is not uncommon to equate musicality with other terms like musical ability, talent, or achievement.<sup>49</sup> ASAA defines musicality as a musician "singing with a legato line, phrasing, performing with dynamics, singing with a steady tempo, diction, and singing in a classical style."<sup>50</sup>

Sture Brändström from the School of Music in Piteå conducted a study to deduce the everyday conception of musicality in music teachers. Through this study, she found the results essentially pulled toward an analysis of musical communication: "To have the ability to express something which another human being experiences. Someone who can transform feelings through their instrument, straight into the heart of the listener" through musical achievement

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49 Brändström, Sture. "Music Teachers' Everyday Conceptions of Musicality." *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 19 (Summer 1999): 21–25. <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/40318978>.

50 Alaska Schools and Activities Association, 2022-2023 Music Handbook. <https://asaa.org/wp-content/uploads/handbook/music/complete/2023-24-Music-Handbook.pdf>.

(ability to produce something from given material) and musical experience (to generate feelings for and from music).<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Brändström discusses two different discourses to describe musicality: an absolute view and a relativistic view. The absolute view prioritizes musical elements that are measurable, reproduced, and centered on achievement, whereas the relative view centers on creativity and the musical experience.<sup>52</sup> She warns that the absolute vantage point of musicality is based on the idea that musicality is reserved for a minority of individuals and could lead to categorical thinking, often associated with Western art music.<sup>53</sup> Based on Brändström's research, the ASAA definition of musicality falls into the absolute viewpoint.

A common philosophy in musicality shared amongst music teachers and conductors is that all human beings are innately musical and that we all can express ourselves through music. These “musical behaviors are universal across human populations, and at the same time, highly diverse in their structures, roles, and cultural interpretation.”<sup>54</sup> Creativity tends to be the leading quality of a relativistic viewpoint, which, like the absolute vantage point of musicality, does not come without controversy either. While originality and authenticity can be observed, measuring the level of a musician's creativity objectively within an audition is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible.

It appears many believe musicality to be a byproduct of inheritance and environment, with the environment being a more influential factor in individual musical growth. The danger of adopting a purely environmental approach to musicality could lead to and perpetuate an elitist attitude that limits the scope of musical possibility. Alternatively, practicing an entirely

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51 Brändström, Sture. “Music Teachers' Everyday Conceptions of Musicality.” *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 19 (Summer 1999): 21–25. <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/40318978>.

52 Brändström

53 Brändström

54 Trehub, Sandra E., Judith Becker, and Iain Morley. “Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Music and Musicality.” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 370, no. 1664 (2015): 20140096.

relativistic approach “could lead to deterministic attitudes by young people...(instigating) different kinds of obstacles to learning.”<sup>55</sup> Striving to provide educational experiences that employ both relativistic and absolute viewpoints of musicality ensures the celebration of individual and cultural identities in our students. It acknowledges diversity in musical performances and fosters measurable growth in qualitative aspects of musical performance.

Analyzing the research on tone quality, musicality, and overall musicianship lends one to ponder if attempting to assess these specific music qualities in a blind audition equitably is even possible. How does one objectively create and implement an audition and assessment process that welcomes the diversity of music-making when individual, cultural, and social preferences will always influence how one defines the qualities of musicianship? An assessment that considers the performance of these musical qualities only from an absolute viewpoint cannot be equitable. Furthermore, the very nature of auditions is not intended to be universally inclusive. Engaging in the selection process is designed to be the complete opposite- to bring together musicians that demonstrate preferred musical skills as displayed in the audition rubric- to determine which musicians are of “All-State caliber.”

Re-defining the highest standards of musicianship requires us to dismantle the barriers of which we have grown accustomed. An inclusive and equitable definition of the highest standards of musicianship promotes the rich tapestry of musical values, perspectives, and qualities in Alaska. An All-State Choir of participants with differing cultural backgrounds and musical traditions will sound different than past iterations of All-State performances. However, the All-State sound must be representative of the state’s musical landscape, which will challenge our preconceived notion of musical excellence and redefine how we describe elitism. An All-State

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<sup>55</sup> Trehub, Sandra E., Judith Becker, and Iain Morley. “Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Music and Musicality.” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 370, no. 1664 (2015): 20140096.

Choir that supports the mission statements of our national choral organizations, where diversity is not only celebrated in terms of the selected conductor and repertoire but also in the participants, is the goal. To accomplish this, we must be willing to step outside our comfort levels and move away from the previously conceived expectations of absolute musicality and a preferred tonal quality to determine musicianship in the selection process.

Considering the two opposing forces of the intention of auditioned choral ensembles versus the journey of improving representation in the choirs of America, a choice must be made. If we choose to continue down the path of conducting auditions with parameters that limit musical diversity, we cannot then expect the participant representation of these ensembles to be an inclusive and accurate representation of all vocal musicians in America. It is time to re-evaluate the universal purpose of the All-State Choral Ensembles and reformulate the selection process to better serve the vocal musicians in all of Alaska.



## CHAPTER IV

### Re-Imagining the Alaska All-State Choir ASAA Mission, Audition, Assessment, Selection

This chapter presents an innovative mission statement, audition, assessment, and selection process to envision a reinvigorated All-State choir that reflects the diversity of vocal musicians in Alaska. Integrating a new audition and assessment process requires a multi-faceted approach that first considers the needs of Alaskan musicians, is supported through research that promotes diverse musical contributions with equitable assessment procedures, and corresponds with the mission statement by the Alaska Schools and Activities Association for the All-State Choirs. Adopted in 1996, ASAA’s mission statement for the Alaska All-State Festival is to “enable outstanding musicians to participate as members of select statewide, band, choral, and orchestral music ensemble and promote the highest standards of musicianship. This activity aims to foster and inspire technical achievement, aesthetic understanding, and critical listening skills that allow for the culmination of a final creative musical performance of the highest artistic level.”<sup>56</sup>

Based on this mission statement, ASAA hopes that participating students will engage in 3 musical activities to achieve a creative cumulative performance: technical achievement, aesthetic understanding, and critical listening skills. Technical achievement and aesthetic understanding correspond with Sture Brändström’s research on absolute and relativistic musicality. Additionally, the goal of enhancing critical thinking skills is supported by David Elliot’s claim for what “counts” in musical performances and is also one of the elements Dr. Bowers includes in her definition of musicianship.

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<sup>56</sup> Alaska Schools and Activities Association, 2022-2023 Music Handbook. <https://asaa.org/wp-content/uploads/handbook/music/complete/2023-24-Music-Handbook.pdf>.

The assumption of musicianship as being defined by quantifiable qualities and the hierarchal language of “outstanding” and “highest standards” in music within the present ASAA All-State mission statement is concerning. This type of language unintentionally de-emphasizes the diversity of music-making and narrows the aesthetic musical contributions across Alaska. I recommend removing the hierarchical language from the Alaska All-State Mission Statement and adopting a new statement that reflects the support of expanded aesthetics represented in Alaskan musicians, allowing the selection process to be more welcoming of the diverse musical contributions of musicians statewide. It could read as such:

“The ASAA/First National Bank Alaska All-State Music Festival provides a platform for select statewide high school musicians to unite as integral members of the band, choral, and orchestral music ensembles. We aim to cultivate an environment that nurtures pedagogical improvement, fosters aesthetic and creative experiences, and enhances critical listening skills. We seek to empower young Alaskan musicians to reach their full potential by embracing the rich tapestries of life and culture in music, cultivating in a final performance that serves as a powerful representation of the diverse lived experiences of Alaskan musicians.”

In addition to updating the ASAA All-State mission statement, it is my recommendation to establish a committee of 6 Alaskan music teachers (1 representative from each ASAA Region to rotate every 2 years) with the 2 ASAA Music Coordinators to review the chosen repertoire for each ensemble to ensure the music is appropriately accessible for Alaskan musicians, is representative of a variety of existing cultures in Alaska, will offer a diverse musical education experience, and reflects the lived experiences of Alaskan musicians.

Several changes in the current audition and assessment processes are recommended to move toward a more inclusive and geographically representative All-State choir. While removing the audition and selection process entirely was considered, this is not feasible due to the infrastructure of rehearsal and concert spaces not safely allowing more than 175 choral participants.

### Audition Adjustments

1. Musicians are welcome to submit 1 audition.
2. Musicians will audition on musical selections from the respective year's All-State repertoire.
3. Musicians will audition on a self-chosen musical excerpt to showcase their unique contributions to the ensemble.
4. Non-musical attributes will be added to the audition process.

### Assessment Adjustments

1. Musicians will be assessed and ranked with other musicians based on their ASAA-determined region.
2. The assessment of tone will be eliminated and replaced with an assessment of the musician's flexibility in multiple styles represented in the programmed music for the respective year's festival.
3. Assessment of musicality as defined by ASAA will be eliminated and replaced with an assessment of the musician's ability to communicate musical intent by performing prescribed musical qualities either notated in the music, suggested by the arranger, composer, and/or conductor in program notes, and/or experienced by the adjudicator.
4. Alaskan choral teachers from each region with submitted auditions will be prioritized to serve as second-round adjudicators.

## Audition Adjustments Justifications

1. Musicians are welcome to submit 1 audition maximum.

ASAA initiated the policy to allow students to audition for up to two vocal parts to raise the influx of money to the organization and assist in a musician's potential for selection. The reduction of money to the organization is a significant ramification but beyond the scope of this research, which focuses on increasing the geographic representation of Alaskan musicians in the choral ensembles. Submitting two auditions does, in fact, increase one's chance of selection; however, this policy also lowers the chances of selection for musicians who are only able or choose to focus on one audition. Based on the number of auditions submitted per region, it is likely most double auditions originate from the regions that house Anchorage (Region 4), Kenai Peninsula Borough (Region 3) and the Matanuska-Susitna Valley (Region 3).

ASAA Region:	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 6
2023 Auditions	2	33	154	179	27	64

In addition to musicians submitting one audition, they will audition for one of the four main voice parts. In the assessment and selection process, adjudicators will select them for either 1 or 2. For example, a tenor auditioning for All-State would submit one audition, and the adjudicator would then select them to sing either Tenor 1 or Tenor 2. This will assist in ensuring ensembles are balanced in voice parts. Incorporating the consideration of two voice parts in one audition submission increases the equitability of selection probability.

2. Musicians will audition on music selections from the respective year's All-State repertoire.

Instead of scales and a chromatic exercise, I recommend asking musicians to sing short excerpts of the selected All-State choral repertoire. Intonation can be assessed in a variety of ways. The integration of assessing intonation within the performance of musical excerpts allows listeners to ascertain additional musical characteristics, providing further avenues for the auditionee to display their musical attributes. The committee of Alaskan teachers designed to ensure the chosen repertoire for the ensembles is ideal will also select two contrasting 16-24 bar passages from the current year's All-State choral repertoire. Musical aids, including language assistance, will be provided for students to assist in audition preparation. Students will have access to a part predominate recording of both selections and a vocal recording presenting all selected texts in the original language.

3. Auditions will now include an individually chosen musical excerpt to showcase their unique contributions to the ensemble.

In addition to the 2 contrasting excerpts from the All-State repertoire, musicians will submit an individually chosen 30-45 second musical excerpt. They will be encouraged to submit performances in their primary language and/or styles most representative of their musical identity. (folk songs, hymns, Indigenous pieces, jazz pieces, spirituals, classical pieces, personally composed pieces, bluegrass pieces, popular tunes, Broadway tunes, etc.) Musicians can accompany themselves, perform with or without additional instruments, or perform with a pre-recorded or live accompaniment. The purpose of this audition portion is to allow musicians to share how they can uniquely contribute to the All-State choral ensemble.

4. Non-musical attributes will be added to the audition process.

Work ethic, reliability, versatility, and motivation are all non-musical but desired qualities of musicians. Participants in the Alaska All-State choirs should consist of musicians dedicated to working collaboratively with motivation for progress. They should be willing to do the necessary preparation work to learn and practice the music and show leadership capabilities in their school choral ensembles. These non-musical attributes are equal to, if not arguably more important than some musical qualities for young musicians to possess and are likely a predictor of whether an individual will be a meaningful contributor to an honor ensemble.

Music Teacher's Confidential Rating								
Please rate the applicant's level of...								
		Needs Work				Near Professional		
Work Ethic	N/A	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Ability to Collaborate	N/A	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Leadership	N/A	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Reliability	N/A	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Willingness to Learn	N/A	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Motivation	N/A	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Optional: Please provide any additional qualities/backgrounds that you believe will provide helpful context in the assessment of this applicant's audition.								

Recognizing the inherent biases often associated with rating evaluations, teachers must maintain honesty and professionalism when completing these forms. While no points will be directly allocated based on these confidential ratings, adjudicators will be prompted to reference this document in cases of unexpected ratings, to aid in resolving tie-breaking situations, and to affirm the selection of students who demonstrate these non-musical attributes in the All-State Choral ensembles.

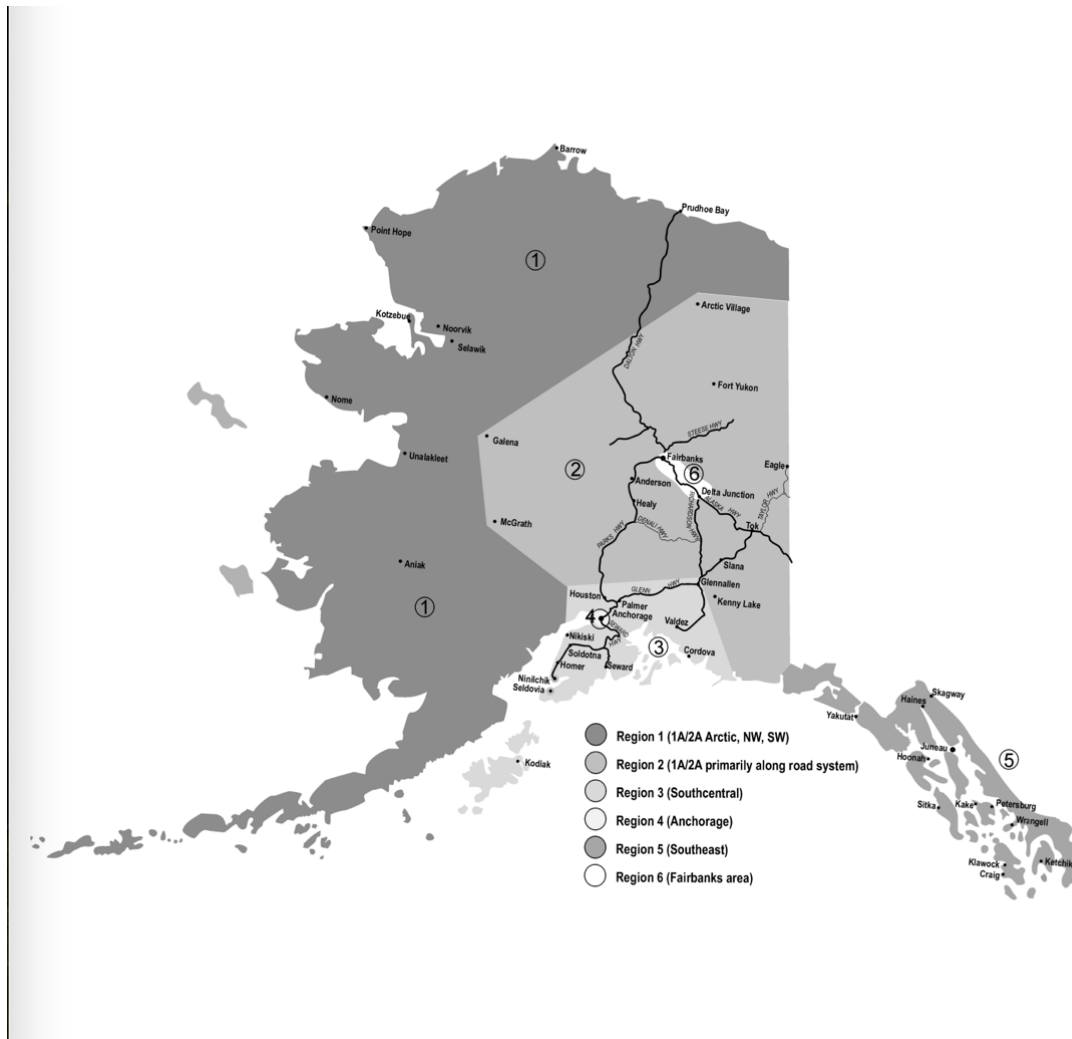
### **Audition Revision Considerations**

The audition revisions have been drafted in response to present research, geographic considerations, a realistic time frame for preparation. They are intended to support the modified ASAA All-State Mission Statement by focusing on comprehensive performance contributions and providing the opportunity for musicians to display their individuality through music choice. These modifications aim to support the diversity of musical aesthetics in Alaskan musicians. It also provides ample content for adjudicators to assess range, tessitura, intonation, and style versatility. Present research regarding qualities of musicality and tone suggests we consider redirecting our focus from auditions that solely focus on specific characteristics for a more equitable and inclusive audition process. Parameters such as the necessity of conducting these auditions online and the geographic expansiveness of Alaska prevent the potential for auditionees to perform with other musicians as part of the audition. While I believe these adjustments will require an increase in time spent for preparation compared to the current process, considering a realistic time frame for audition preparation and completion and the time adjudicators asked to assess these auditions is also a necessary component.

## Assessment Adjustments Justifications

1. Musicians will be assessed and ranked with musicians in their pre-determined region.

ASAA has divided the state into six geographical regions. Assessing and ranking auditions in each of the six regions ensures a more equitable comparison of students with similar resource and educational accessibility. I recommend ASAA commit to a selection process that ensures the top-ranked students from all regions with submitted auditions are selected each year to participate.



Similar regional considerations are being implemented in other states across the United States to help with geographic representation. For example, in Tennessee, musicians undergo an audition



in either the Western, Central, or Eastern areas of the state and are selected for the All-State Choirs from within their pool of auditionees.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, while population limitations would prevent this approach for Alaska, the Texas Music Educators Association has established a separate All-State Small Schools Mixed Choir for musicians living in smaller, more rural areas of Texas.<sup>58</sup>

2. The assessment of tone will be eliminated and replaced with an assessment of the musician's flexibility in multiple styles represented in the programmed music for the respective year's festival.
3. Assessment of musicality as defined by ASAA will be eliminated and replaced with an assessment of the musician's ability to communicate musical intent by performing prescribed musical qualities either notated in the music, suggested by the arranger, composer, and/or conductor in program notes, and/or experienced by the adjudicator.

Recognizing the direct influence primary language can have on tonal quality<sup>59</sup> and research that suggests collective tonal flexibility in ensemble settings<sup>60</sup>, I recommend removing tone quality as an assessment quality. The removal of musicality, as defined by ASAA, is intended to expand accepted musical qualities to allow for effective musical communication. "Rubrics (and assessments) focused solely on technical expectations do not fully encourage student

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57 "2024 All-State Ensembles Handbook." Tennessee Music Educators Association, 2024. [https://www.tnmea.org/\\_files/ugd/23721c\\_be029f2ee32f4feebeb128df001eabc0.pdf](https://www.tnmea.org/_files/ugd/23721c_be029f2ee32f4feebeb128df001eabc0.pdf).

58 "All-State Small School Mixed Choir Entering Students to an All-State Path Audition." Texas Music Educators Association, March 2020. <https://www.tmea.org/vocal/all-state/small-school/>.

59 Han, Shui'er, Janani Sundararajan, Daniel Liu Bowling, Jessica Lake, and Dale Purves. "Co-Variation of Tonality in the Music and Speech of Different Cultures." PLoS ONE 6, no. 5 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0020160>.

60 Decker, Harold A., Julius Herford, and Howard Swan. "The Development of a Choral Instrument." Essay. In *Choral Conducting: A Symposium*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1973.

musicianship and engagement in expressive aspects of performance.”<sup>61</sup> Instead, musicians will be assessed on their ability to perform in various musical styles effectively.

The two rubrics below reflect the suggested assessment modifications in the Alaska All-State audition process. Adjudicators will be asked to assess intonation, stylistically appropriate performance qualities, developmentally appropriate vocalism, and notational and rhythmic performance accuracy in contrasting styles of music. The first rubric has been drafted for the individually chosen music excerpt. It utilizes the stylistically appropriate performance qualities and developmentally appropriate vocalism assessment categories. The notational and rhythmic performance accuracy categories are not included in this rubric to account for the potential of improvisation or other notational changes in the service of the musical performance. Intonation has also been removed to account for chosen pieces with a musical structure outside modes utilizing whole and half-steps. An added column for notable vocal attributes not already accounted for in the rubric has been added to offer adjudicators the potential to consider additional musical contributions for selection consideration. This column is not intended to be utilized as an area for concerns but as an opportunity to acknowledge unique, unexpected, or rare stylistic vocal performance observations that could contribute to the Alaskan All-State ensemble identity. The second rubric consists of all previously described assessment categories for the two contrasting musical excerpts selected from the programmed All-State Choir repertoire.

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61 DeLuca, Christopher, and Benjamin Bolden. "Music performance assessment: Exploring three approaches for quality rubric construction." *Music Educators Journal* 101, no. 1 (2014): 70-76.

## Personally Chosen Excerpt

	Superior 50 Points	Excellent 40 Points	Good 30 Points	Fair 20 Points	Developing 10 Points	Point Totals
<b>Stylistically Appropriate Performance Qualities</b>	Musical selection is delivered deliberately and with apparent comprehension of musical intent. Superior expression with appropriate stylistic elements of phrasing, dynamic contrasts, tempi, and articulations.	Musical selection is delivered well. Some evidence of musical intent is noticeable. Minor lapses in expression to include phrasing, dynamic contrasts, tempi, and/or articulations.	Musical selection is stylistically appropriate, but comprehension of musical intent is missing. Expression is occasionally rigid and mechanical with some tempo, phrasing, and dynamic elements absent.	Musical selection is sometimes stylistically appropriate. Comprehension of musical intent is missing. Expression is mechanical most of the time. Attention to performance qualities including tempo, phrasing, and dynamics are missing.	Musical selection is not stylistically appropriate. Further development of musical intent is suggested. Exploration of incorporating expressive qualities and attention to performance qualities is encouraged.	
<b>Developmentally Appropriate Vocalism</b>	Delivery of musical selection is made with age-appropriate vocal production and is stylistically appropriate to the chosen repertoire in all ranges and registers of musical selection.	Delivery of musical selection is made with age-appropriate vocal production. There are minor phonation and production inconsistencies as a result of the musical selection's range/tessitura.	Delivery of musical selection is made with age-appropriate vocal production. Some inconsistencies exist in phonation and production, impacting the overall musical performance.	Delivery of musical selection sometimes utilizes age-appropriate vocal production. Inconsistent phonation and/or production throughout the piece has impacted the overall musical performance.	Delivery of musical selection does not utilize age-appropriate vocal production. Inappropriate or under energized breath support frequently impacts phonation. Concerns of vocal health are evident in the performance.	
<b>Comments/Observations/Unique Vocal Contributions:</b>						
						Total Points out of 100

## All State Excerpts Rubric

	Superior 20 Points	Excellent 15 Points	Good 10 Points	Fair 5 Points	Developing 2 Points	Point Totals
<b>Intonation</b>	Accurate intonation in all ranges and registers. Pitch adjustments are stylistically appropriate.	Minimal intonation difficulties. Pitch adjustments are mostly stylistically accurate.	Mostly accurate intonation. Pitch adjustment is developing and sometimes stylistically appropriate.	Intonation is often inconsistent. Pitch adjustment skills are underdeveloped.	Unawareness of tuning issues. A need to develop pitch adjustment skills.	
<b>Stylistically Appropriate Performance Qualities</b>	Musical selection is delivered deliberately and with apparent comprehension of musical intent. Superior expression with appropriate stylistic elements of phrasing, dynamic contrasts, tempi, and articulations.	Musical performance is delivered well. Some evidence of musical intent is noticeable. Minor lapses in expression to include phrasing, dynamic contrasts, tempi, and/or articulations.	Musical performance is stylistically appropriate, but comprehension of musical intent is missing. Expression is occasionally rigid and mechanical with some tempo, phrasing, and dynamic elements absent.	Musical performance is sometimes stylistically appropriate. Comprehension of musical intent is missing. Expression is mechanical most of the time. Attention to performance qualities including tempo, phrasing, and dynamics are missing.	Musical performance is not stylistically appropriate. Further development of musical intent is suggested. Exploration of incorporating expressive qualities and attention to performance qualities is encouraged.	
<b>Developmentally Appropriate Vocalism</b>	Delivery of musical selection is made with developmentally appropriate vocal production. Breath supports consistent phonation in all ranges and registers of musical selection.	Delivery of musical selection is made with developmentally appropriate vocal production. Breath support is mostly consistent but results in minor phonation inconsistencies of musical selection.	Delivery of musical selection is made with developmentally appropriate vocal production. Breath support is sometimes consistent resulting in several phonation inconsistencies.	Delivery of musical selection sometimes utilizes developmentally appropriate vocal production. Breath support is developing. Phonation is often inconsistent.	Delivery of musical selection does not utilize developmentally appropriate vocal production. Inappropriate or under energized breath support frequently impacts phonation. Concerns of vocal health are evident in the performance.	
<b>Pitch Performance Accuracy</b>	All notes are performed accurately.	Infrequent pitch errors. Some minor incorrect intervalic relationships present.	Some pitch errors.	Several pitch errors present.	Lack of preparation has resulted in substantial pitch errors.	
<b>Rhythmic Performance Accuracy</b>	All rhythms are performed accurately.	Infrequent rhythmic errors.	Some rhythmic errors.	Several rhythmic errors.	Lack of preparation has resulted in substantial rhythmic errors.	
<b>Comments</b>						
						Total Points out of 100

4. Alaskan choral teachers from each region with submitted auditions will be prioritized to serve as second-round adjudicators.

Multiple adjudicators for auditions of the same voice part have been implemented several times in past festival seasons based on the number of auditions submitted. This is designed to reduce rater error for fatigue and the amount of time spent completing audition assessments. I propose maintaining this model and prioritizing Alaskan choral teachers from each region as second-round adjudicators for a differing Alaskan region. Hiring adjudicators outside of Alaska for initial audition assessments ensures musicians receive diverse feedback and perspectives, aiding in continued growth. However, after initial rankings are completed, utilizing choral teachers in Alaska in the final selection process offers an additional opportunity for purposeful selection participation, as Alaskan teachers know the musical contributions and capabilities of their students best. Additionally, I propose a short online training for all adjudicators to ensure full comprehension of these rubrics, confirm expectations for adjudicator responsibility, and answer any questions before beginning the assessment process.

### **Suggested Adjudication Adjustments**

#### Round 1 Adjudication

Regions with 39 or fewer submitted auditions can be assessed by one initial adjudicator per region. Regions with 40-120 submitted auditions should be evaluated by no less than two first-round adjudicators per region. If a region submits more than 120 auditions, additional adjudicators should be utilized for initial audition assessments. It is suggested that one adjudicator should not be asked to listen to more than 60 individual auditions.

## Round 2 Adjudication

Following the initial audition assessments, in regions with more than 39 total auditions, the top 60% of submissions in each voice part will be sent to the second-round Alaskan adjudicators for final rankings. Regions with 39 or fewer total auditions will be ranked collectively as opposed to per voice part, with the top 60% moving forward to the second round of Alaskan teacher adjudications.

## Revised Selection Process

The selection process after final rankings should coincide as best as possible with ASAA suggested numbers per voice part.

Mixed Choir	Total	Treble Choir	Total	Voice Part Numbers	Total
Soprano 1	10	Soprano 1	20	Soprano 1	30
Soprano 2	11	Soprano 2	22	Soprano 2	33
Alto 1	10	Alto 1	21	Alto 1	31
Alto 2	11	Alto 2	23	Alto 2	34
Tenor 1	10			Tenor 1	10
Tenor 2	11			Tenor 2	11
Baritone	11			Baritone	11
Bass	13			Bass	13

Based on recent total audition submissions, I recommend all regions have between a 40-50% acceptance rate. The goal of this adjustment is not to diminish the work of the more densely populated areas but to offer a more equitable selection process statewide, ensuring musicians with top-ranked auditions in each region are represented in the All-State choirs. I hope that with these audition and assessment adjustments, audition submissions increase statewide, particularly in the less populated and rural areas of Alaska. If/when that occurs, re-examining the range of

selection percentages per region may be necessary. However, based on submission data from recent years, 40-50% appears to be currently appropriate.

The scenario below shows how this new selection process could be implemented utilizing estimated numbers based on previous audition/regional submissions and accounting for 1 audition per musician.

2024 Audition Estimations

	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 6
2024 Total Anticipated Auditions: 375	4	30	120	150	20	51
Soprano Auditions: 105	1	7	33	44	7	13
Alto Auditions: 180	1	16	60	71	10	22
Tenor Auditions: 45	1	4	13	18	1	8
Bass Auditions: 45	1	3	14	17	2	8

In the sample scenario of submissions, selected All-State participants could look something like this:

	Audition Submissions	Selected Musicians	Selection Percentage	Total Ensemble Representation Percentage
Region 1	4	2	50%	1.10%
Region 2	30	13	43.30%	7.50%
Region 3	120	54	45%	31%
Region 4	150	74	49.30%	42.20%
Region 5	20	8	40%	4.60%
Region 6	51	22	43.00%	12.70%

	Soprano Auditions	Soprano's Selected	Alto Auditions	Alto's Selected	Tenor Auditions	Tenor's Selected	Bass Auditions	Bass's Selected
Region 1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
Region 2	7	2	16	8	4	1	3	2
Region 3	33	19	60	22	13	6	14	7
Region 4	44	31	71	24	18	9	17	10
Region 5	7	4	10	4	1	0	2	0
Region 6	13	7	22	6	8	4	8	5

This 2024 scenario is based on the previous year’s audition submissions and does not account for an anticipated increase in auditions following the proposed changes. In comparing the total ensemble representation percentages per region with the same data collected from 2023, the only region with a reduced rate of selected participants is Region 4 (Anchorage) with a 4.4% reduction in participants chosen. All other regions show either an increase in selected participants or remain relatively constant with a minor percentage increase. The unaccounted-for factor in this scenario is the number of audition submissions. I hope that with the adjusted audition contents and the addition of a personally chosen music selection more musicians in all regions, especially those encompassing rural and smaller communities, feel compelled to submit auditions due to the updated audition and assessment processes.

**Summary**

The proposed changes to increasing representation in the selected participants of the Alaska All-State Choirs include updating the mission statement to support a wider acceptance of musical aesthetics by removing the hierarchical language indicating quantifiable qualities of musicianship, with a commitment to geographic representation in selected participants across the state. In support of this mission statement, the audition contents have been modified to three musical excerpts designed for adjudicators to hear comprehensive musical performances so that

the selection and adjudication processes can be more informed. For assessment, two formalized rubrics have been created that eliminate tone and musicality as assessment categories and instead focus on a musician's ability to engage in stylistically appropriate performances with developmentally appropriate vocalisms while maintaining the importance of assessing intonation and the ability to perform notated excerpts with pitch and rhythmic accuracy. Following the assessment, the ranking and selection processes are implemented with attention to selection representation based on rankings that consider the educational resources and opportunities available to Alaskan musicians for each region while also upholding the suggested number of participants and voice parts from the Alaska School and Activities Association Music Handbook.

Implementing these evidence-based alterations requires a willingness from administrators, educators, and students to adopt practices that have become traditions and expectations. The mission outlined in this chapter, along with the proposed adjustments to the audition, assessment, and selection procedures, seeks to support a redefined All-State choral ensemble as a platform that welcomes more diverse musical aesthetics while actively ensuring inclusivity in the selection process. These actions support the aspiration to empower musicians from the entire state of Alaska to contribute meaningfully to the All-State choral ensembles.



## CHAPTER V

### Summary and Call to Action

#### **Summary**

The purpose of engaging in this research was to introduce a novel audition, assessment, and selection process that improves the geographic representation of participating musicians within the Alaska All-State Choral ensembles. The absence of data prevented this research from formally including cultural representation as an additional goal. However, I hope that by prioritizing geographic representation and altering the audition process to promote a more comprehensive array of musical aesthetics, cultural representation in the All-State Choir ensembles will improve because of increased geographic representation. The state of Alaska was the primary state of research, but I hope that similar steps can be taken to devise updated audition, assessment, and selection processes for additional state, regional, and national honor choir festivals across the United States.

The process for this research began with anecdotal evidence of selected participants in the choral ensembles collected by attending the Alaska All-State Festivals from 2011-2019. Consistent feedback from our invited conductor clinicians was that the cultural representation of the ensembles reflected a less diverse representation of Alaskan students than they had anticipated. Following my departure from the Anchorage School District, I continued my involvement in this festival by adjudicating auditions from 2021 to the present, primarily assessing soprano auditions. The time spent as an adjudicator assisted in additional anecdotal evidence regarding the parameters and expectations within the assessment process. To further research the evidence collected regarding the representation of choral participants in the Alaska All-State Choirs, I began collecting tangible audition and participation data from 2021 to present

to determine geographic, regional, and school trends of selected musicians for the ensembles. I compiled data on how the number of students submitting auditions from each region and individual school and then compared that information with the selected participants per school and region. I hoped to be able to document any notable changes from each year in terms of geographic or regional increases or decreases in submitted auditions and selected students to ascertain a more comprehensive understanding of who primarily auditions and is selected for the Alaska All-State Choirs.

While successful in acquiring the most desired data, I was unable to compile research denoting how many and the location of musicians submitted two auditions for 2022 and 2023, total audition submissions from 2022, and the selection percentage for treble and tenor/bass voices in 2022 and 2023. I believe that the limitations of one music coordinator responsible for all state-sponsored music festivals contributed to the inability to ascertain all desired data. However, there are now 2 full-time music coordinators, which will hopefully improve participation data availability to be able to continue monitoring these trends in the future.

Despite the lack of all desired data for this research, enough information was compiled to conclude that the current audition, assessment, and selection processes, supported by the Alaska Schools and Activities Association Mission Statement, limit the representation of selected participants in the Alaska All-State Choirs. In 2023, Alaska's 4 most populated areas, including the Anchorage Municipality, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Fairbanks North Star Borough, and Kenai Peninsula Borough, comprised of 85.2% of all selected choral participants in the All-State Festival, a growth of 3.2% from the previous year with the Anchorage Municipality consisting of 46.6% of all selected participants in 2023, an increase of 11.2% from 2022. Rural musicians with populations of less than 2,500 consisted of 6.7% in 2023, a reduction of .1% from

2022. Interestingly, musicians from these rural areas consisted of 11.7% of total audition submissions in 2023, more than the Kenai Peninsula Borough and in the Southeast community auditions, which comprises the Sitka City and Borough, Juneau City and Borough, Ketchikan Gateway Borough, and Petersburg Borough. This data is significant because it supports the claim that rural Alaskan musicians are being underserved in the current All-State processes. It negates the rebuttal that students from these areas of Alaska are not submitting auditions. Additionally, this data supports my original hypothesis that these audition, assessment, and selection processes promote musical aesthetics most often experienced in educational environments centered around Western-centric music education practiced in the more densely populated areas of Alaska.

Following the completion of the data collection, I began to examine the mission of the Alaska All-State Festival, the contents of the audition and assessment rubrics, and the manner in which selection is determined. I identified four primary areas to consider modifications to better serve Alaska's musicians.

1. The mission statement of the All-State Festival highlights hierarchical elements of musicianship that negate musical qualities outside of Western aesthetics.
2. The audition promotes four tracks that are heavily intonation-focused, with minimal opportunities for students to display unique musical contributions.
3. The assessment lacks parameter clarity, promotes a traditional form of music education with qualities most associated with a classical style of singing<sup>62</sup>, and prioritizes musical elements that do not welcome a diverse array of musical aesthetics.
4. The selection process does not consider young Alaskan musicians' vast and diverse educational experiences.

The Alaska Schools and Activities Associations' present mission statement for the Alaska All-State Festival is,

“The ASAA/First National Bank Alaska All-State Music Festival enables outstanding musicians to participate as members of select statewide, band, choral, and orchestral music ensembles and promote the highest standards of musicianship. The goal of this activity is to

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<sup>62</sup> This is supported through the current assessment rubric with the text, “In addition to the musicality criteria outlined on the first page (of this rubric), also consider diction and classical style of singing.”

foster and inspire technical achievement, aesthetic understanding, and critical listening skills that allow for the culmination of a final creative musical performance of the highest artistic level.”<sup>63</sup>

Quantifying musicianship utilizing the hierarchical language of “outstanding” and “highest standards” unintentionally de-emphasizes the vast musical aesthetics practiced throughout Alaska and limits diversity in music-making. The proposed modification to the ASAA mission statement reads,

“The ASAA/First National Bank Alaska All-State Music Festival provides a platform for select statewide high school musicians to come together as integral members of the band, choral, and orchestral music ensembles. We aim to cultivate an environment that nurtures pedagogical improvement, fosters aesthetic and creative experiences, and enhances critical listening skills. We seek to empower young Alaskan musicians to reach their full potential by embracing the rich tapestries of life and culture in music, cultivating in a final performance that serves as a powerful representation of the diverse lived experiences of Alaskan musicians.”

Following the modification of the mission statement, we can engage in a novel audition and assessment process that welcomes a wider array of musical aesthetics. Removing vocal exercises and incorporating musical excerpts allows for musicians to showcase their musicianship more comprehensively. This can be manifested by asking musicians to audition on musical selections from the respective year’s All-State repertoire and by asking students to submit an audition on a self-selected musical excerpt of their choice. Additionally, non-musical attributes and the context of a musician’s background should be considered to determine better a student’s ability to be a meaningful contributor to the ensemble as a part of the comprehensive evaluation.

Regarding assessment modifications, removing tonal quality as an assessment criterion and replacing it with ascertaining a musician’s ability to sing in multiple styles removes the

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<sup>63</sup> Alaska Schools and Activities Association, 2022-2023 Music Handbook. <https://asaa.org/wp-content/uploads/handbook/music/complete/2023-24-Music-Handbook.pdf>.

implicit bias of preferred tone quality and prioritizes performance practice and diversity of musical performances. With thoughtful musical excerpt choices from each respective year's repertoire, assessing style in a variety of musics also helps reduce preconceived notions of a hierarchy of styles of repertoire. Additionally, if we remove musicality as defined by ASAA<sup>64</sup> and prioritize the comprehension of informed intent, we can better ascertain a musician's ability to interpret and musically communicate based on composer notes and/or prescribed musical qualities within a score.

The selection process following the assessment asks Alaska to consider assessing musicians within their ASAA-sanctioned regions as opposed to within the entirety of the state. Given the vast array of musical access and diversity of music education musicians experience throughout the state, it is not equitable to compare auditions from musicians who receive such different musical experiences with each other. I acknowledge that this is not entirely rectified with my proposed selection modifications. However, it allows for our musicians to be ranked with other musicians in similar access circumstances, both for our rural and more urban/suburban musicians. This adjustment does not come without asking the community to reimagine who comprises an All-State choral ensemble. Improving geographic representation in the All-State ensembles requires us to re-examine the selection process based on geography so that the All-State Choirs can actually be *all state* choirs.

### **Call to Action**

The All-State ensemble model was created in a Western European model with the hope of establishing advanced honor ensembles that challenge our young musicians, offer the

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<sup>64</sup> The present ASAA Adjudication Form defines musicality as singing with, “legato line, phrasing, dynamics, steady tempo, diction, and [a] classical style of singing.”

opportunity to collaborate with other advanced musicians, and provide a sense of pride by being selected through the audition and assessment processes. Students feel a sense of accomplishment in being selected for these ensembles, and I have seen how participating in these ensembles can be a positive and potentially life-altering experience for young musicians.

My concern lies not in the benevolent intent of All-State honor choirs, nor in the practice of holding auditions. It delves into the fundamental methods employed to evaluate musicianship and the hierarchical structure imposed on musical qualities. The current framework minimizes the musical contributions of musicians whose artistic expressions diverge from the standards we uphold in these auditions and assessments. Acknowledging these concerns, it's imperative to take action by implementing accommodations to promote a broader spectrum of musical aesthetics, particularly those that may not directly align with the traditional criterion emphasized in current processes. Furthermore, the diverse backgrounds and varying levels of educational access among young musicians must be considered and incorporating these factors into the selection process will assist in fostering a more equitable honor choir environment that aligns with the missions of the American Choral Director's Association<sup>65</sup> and National Association for Music Educators<sup>66</sup>, where every aspiring musician feels valued and has a fair opportunity to participate in an honor choir.

To support all students in their musical endeavors and uphold the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, I urge all state organizations responsible for hosting All-State Choral Festivals to consider reviewing existing policies, procedures, and mission statements to determine the effectiveness of these frameworks in promoting inclusivity, and to make

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<sup>65</sup> ACDA aims "to inspire excellence and nurture lifelong involvement in choral music for everyone through education, composition, and advocacy."

<sup>66</sup> NAfME aims "to advance music education by promoting the understand and making of music by all" with a vision to lead "the world in music education, empowering generations to create, perform, and respond to music."

recommendations for modification where necessary to better align with the shared commitment to supporting all students in their musical journeys.

Auditions inherently involve a selection process, which, by their very nature, is not intended to be universally inclusive. However, practicing equity requires us to move beyond the notions of equality. We can be more purposeful about how auditions are designed and conducted to be more inclusive in the content being evaluated. Doing so reflects efforts toward establishing a more representative and enriching honor choir community that celebrates and represents diverse voices, promoting music for and by all.

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## APPENDIX

<b>Alaska All-State Audition and Selection Data</b>			
Location, School Name, ASAA Region	Selections in 2022	Auditions in 2023	Selections in 2023
<b>Anchorage ASAA Region 4</b>	62	194	83
Bartlett	7	12	5
Chugiak	7	22	10
Dimond	11	25	9
Eagle River	4	18	10
East High	7	10	4
Grace Christian (Region 3)	5	12	6
Service	4	26	9
South Anchorage	7	23	12
West Anchorage	9	43	17
Anchorage Christian (Region 2)	1	0	0
Mt City Christian Academy (Region 3)		3	1
<b>Fairbanks ASAA Region 6</b>	20	60	19
Lathrop	13	22	7
North Pole	3	20	5
West Valley	4	18	7
<b>Matanuska-Susitna Valley ASAA Region 3</b>	37	85	29
Colony	18	53	18
Houston	1	7	0
Palmer	13	15	7
Wasilla	5	10	4
<b>Kenai Peninsula Borough ASAA Region 3</b>	26	44	21
Homer	11	20	10
Kenai-Central	8	12	6
Soldotna	7	12	5

<b>Southeastern Communities ASAA Region 5</b>	15	22	9
Juneau-Douglas	2	0	0
Thunder Mountain	4	5	0
Ketchikan	3	2	0
Mt. Edgecumbe	4	7	3
Sitka	2	8	6
<b>Rural/Small Communities</b>			
<b>Region 1</b>	0	2	0
Bethel	0	1	0
Barrow	0	1	0
Dillingham	0	0	0
Unalakleet	0	0	0
<b>Region 2</b>	5	33	9
Nanana	1	5	2
Cantwell	1	0	0
Cordova	3	17	5
Tri-Valley	0	11	2
Cook Inlet	0	0	0
<b>Region 3</b>	0	10	3
Nikiski	0	6	2
Kodiak	0	4	1
Redington High	0	0	0
<b>Region 5</b>	8	5	3
Haines	5	2	1
Skagway	1	0	0
Petersburg	1	1	0
Wrangell	1	2	2
Metlakatla	0	0	0
<b>Region 6</b>	2	4	1
Valdez	2	4	1
*Unknown	N/A	N/A	1
<b>Total Numbers</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>178</b>