



Seattle Youth Symphony Orchestras:

*SYSO in the Schools*

2012- 2013 Evaluation Report

prepared by Anne Basham Shukla, M.F.A. and Mary Murray, M.A.

MEMconsultants

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**MEMconsultants**

p.o. box 18464, seattle, wa 98118 / 206.324.2280 / [www.memconsultants.com](http://www.memconsultants.com)

## *An Introduction to SYSO*

Founded in 1942, Seattle Youth Symphony Orchestras (SYSO) is the largest youth orchestra training program in the United States. The organization serves nearly 1,700 students each year with four full orchestras, three summer festival programs and partnerships with local public schools.

***SYSO in the Schools*** (SITS) brings professional musicians into the school setting to provide one-on-one and small group instruction, free of charge, as an enhancement to the school-offered instrumental music program. Two SITS programs increase access to music education in public schools in and around Seattle:

**Southwest Seattle String Project (SW Strings)** – operating in one of Seattle Public School’s highest poverty areas, SYSO provides free support from professional musician coaches who co-teach with school instrumental music instructors, aiding students in the early stages of learning string instruments. SYSO coaches also provide free before-school lessons at each school and instruct at rehearsals of the West Seattle Community Orchestras to extend their support of these students. Students have the opportunity to perform with top-level Seattle Youth Symphony musicians for friends and family at the annual Southwest Super Strings Saturday.

### **SW Strings Facts**

7 elementary schools  
1 middle school  
1 community orchestra  
377 students served  
65% low income  
6 coaches

**Endangered Instruments Program (EIP)** – founded in 1991 to address the shortage of students studying certain orchestral instruments and the subsequent shortage of players of these instruments for orchestras at every level: student, community and professional. The program has helped students advance further and play longer and, in some cases, earn entrance into a SYSO academic year orchestra. Students have the opportunity to perform with other EIP and academic year orchestra students for friends and family at the annual Side-by-Side event.

### **EIP Facts**

6 Seattle schools  
11 non-Seattle schools  
7 school districts  
271 students served  
7 endangered instruments  
17 coaches

### **Evaluation Data Sources**

64 Family Surveys (45 EIP, 19 SW Strings)  
11 Family Interviews (6 EIP, 5 SW Strings)  
17 Coach Surveys (11 EIP, 5 SW Strings, 1 Both)  
15 Instrumental Music Teacher Surveys (13 EIP, 2 SW Strings)

#### **SW Strings Data Sources**

2 Coach Interviews  
2 Instrumental Music Teacher Interviews  
2 Principal Interviews

#### **EIP Data Sources**

123 Student Surveys  
21 Student Interviews

## Findings

By tracking program activities year after year, Seattle Youth Symphony Orchestras has identified four key areas of program impact: Engagement, Perseverance, Achievement and Growth Beyond Music<sup>1</sup>.

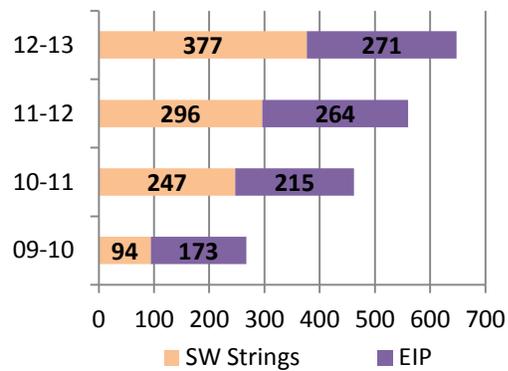
### Engagement

#### Active recruitment and instruction by SYSO coaches introduces more students to instrumental music.

Because of *SYSO in the Schools*, more students are able to receive expert, individualized musical instrument instruction.<sup>2</sup>

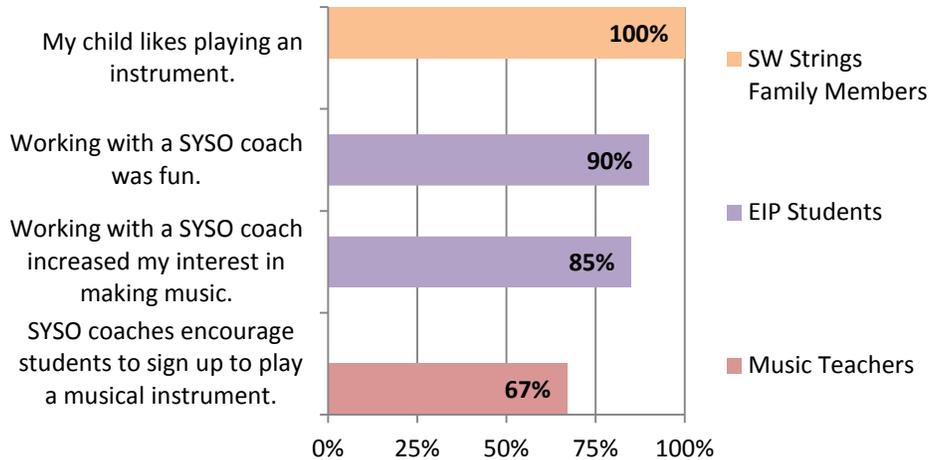
*The bulk of our 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders participate in the instrumental music program. I don't know how our EIM could serve that many kids without the two SYSO coaches. We have a lot more participation in strings as a result. – SW Strings Principal*

**SYSO in the Schools Enrollment**



**Engagement with Musical Instruments**

% who agree somewhat or strongly



<sup>1</sup> When referring to earlier evaluation reports for this program, please note that these impact areas were previously titled Recruitment, Retention, Advancement and Youth Development.

<sup>2</sup> SW Strings enrollment chart includes data for all eight partner schools: seven elementary and one middle school.

**Through its partnership with Seattle Public Schools, SYSO brings instrument instruction to students least likely to have access to the arts.**

A 2012 report on access to arts education in Seattle Public Schools found that “Asian and especially Black and Hispanic students are overrepresented in schools with no music instruction.” Additionally, “Students taking less than the average number of arts courses are overrepresented by these demographic categories: FRL<sup>3</sup> status, bilingual and ethnicity – Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native.”<sup>4</sup>

*We have kids with all different backgrounds, learning disabilities and playing ability. Having more bodies in the classroom is crucial to meeting the needs of all the kids.*  
– SW Strings Coach

Therefore, it is significant that these groups are strongly represented, often in numbers greater than the overall district average (indicated by numbers in **bold** in the table below), in the elementary schools served by SW Strings. SW Strings reaches students who might not otherwise have access to musical education.

	<b>SW Strings Elementary Schools</b>							<i>District Average</i>
	Arbor Heights	Concord	Gatewood	Highland Park	Roxhill	Sanislo	West Seattle	
American Indian	1%	1%	1%	<b>4%</b>	<b>3%</b>	1%	<b>2%</b>	1%
Black	13%	15%	16%	17%	<b>24%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>47%</b>	19%
Hispanic	12%	<b>59%</b>	12%	<b>27%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>22%</b>	12%
Asian/Pacific Islander	11%	10%	7%	<b>30%</b>	16%	<b>27%</b>	16%	19%
White	<b>58%</b>	13%	<b>57%</b>	16%	13%	27%	9%	43%
Multi-Racial	6%	2%	<b>7%</b>	<b>7%</b>	6%	<b>11%</b>	4%	6%
Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible	39%	<b>78%</b>	40%	<b>78%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>88%</b>	43%
English Language Learners	6%	<b>40%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>36%</b>	10%
Special Ed.	<b>15%</b>	12%	12%	14%	<b>21%</b>	8%	<b>15%</b>	14%

**SW Strings Elementary School Student Demographics 2011-12**

*Students in our special education classes participate in instrumental music as well and this is a huge gift for them.* – SW Strings Principal

<sup>3</sup> Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible

<sup>4</sup> de Soto, Annette. “Arts Access Survey and Cohort Analysis Results.” Beyond the Divide; Seattle, WA, June 2012.

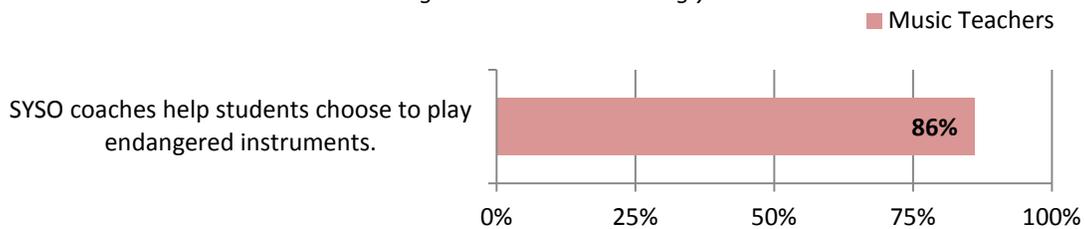
**EIP fosters engagement with less commonly played, “endangered” instruments.**

Many family members who completed the survey indicated that the instrument their child plays in EIP was their first instrument (18%) or that their child switched to this instrument because of EIP (50%). About one-third (32%) indicated that their child played an endangered instrument prior to EIP and continues to play in the program.

*Having someone to teach students to play “endangered” instruments has led to the growth in numbers of those instruments in band classes.*  
– EIP Band Teacher

**Engagement with Endangered Instruments**

*% who agree somewhat or strongly*



When asked why they chose to play an instrument, many students commented that they liked the uniqueness of the instrument.

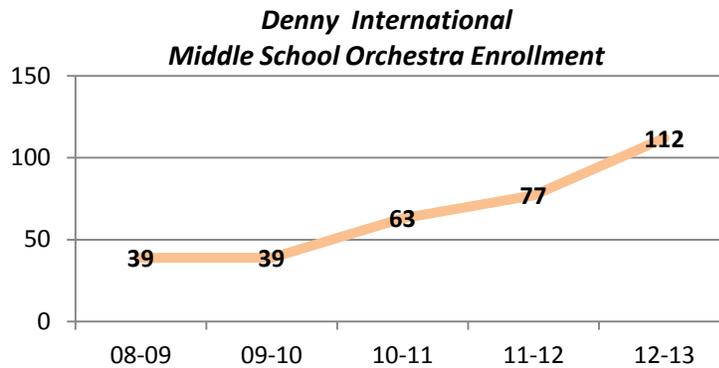
*I liked how it was something new to me. Unheard of. So I thought I'd try it out.*  
– EIP Student

*My son was playing the piano, but he switched to the bassoon. Now he wants to stay in the school band. Without EIP, he would probably still play the piano, but wouldn't be as excited about the instrument.*  
– EIP Family Member

## Perseverance

**SYSO supports each student’s commitment to multi-year participation in music programs.**

In 2009, SYSO began offering SW Strings to fourth and fifth graders attending four Southwest Seattle Elementary Schools. The next year, when many of these the fifth graders entered sixth grade at Denny International Middle School, middle school orchestra enrollment increased 61%. This same year, SYSO expanded programming to three more elementary schools and Denny Middle School. Denny Middle School Orchestra enrollment continues to rise and has almost tripled since the beginning of SW Strings. Additionally, 55% of music teachers that have worked with SYSO for more than two years see increased retention in their band or orchestra program.



*[Without SW Strings], I think there would be a very fast attrition rate within the music program.*

– SW Strings EIM Teacher

*I really like the French Horn, I want to keep playing as long as I can.*

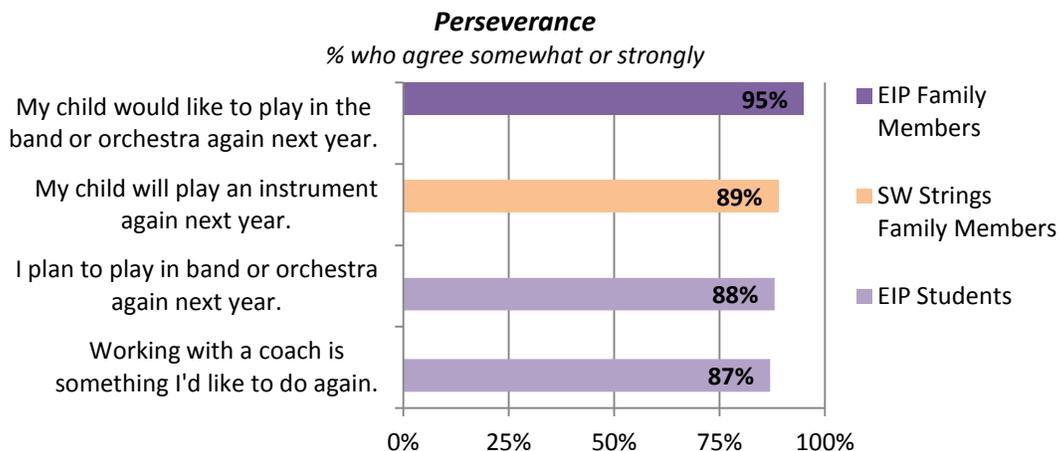
– EIP Student

**Students and family members value continued involvement in playing a musical instrument.**

Most EIP students (88%) agree that they will play an instrument in band or orchestra again next year. Some report an interest in continuing to play as a hobby, while others wish to pursue a career in music. For many students, the availability and quality of continued music instruction matters. They picture themselves playing in band or orchestra at schools with a reputation for high quality music programs.

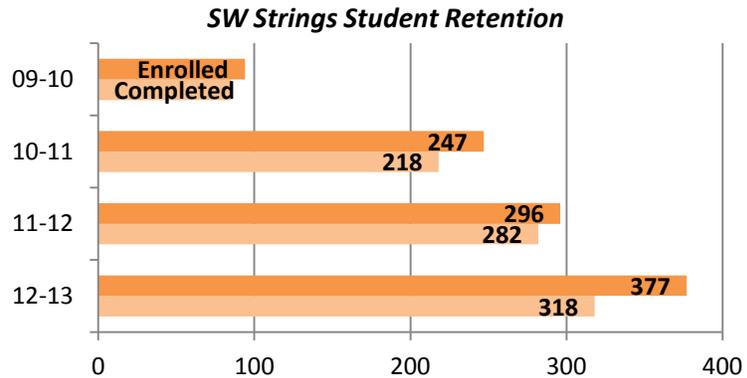
*The students learn how valuable they are in the big scheme, how their picked instrument will help them down the road with college scholarships.*

– EIP Coach



## SW Strings retention rates remain high, but fell compared to past years.

Overall retention for the eight SW Strings partner schools, including Denny International Middle School, remains high, with 84% of students who enrolled in orchestra in November continuing to play through April. However, unlike past years, the elementary school retention rate for SW Strings (73%) is lower than the Seattle Public



Schools district average Elementary Instrumental Music retention rate (84%). It should be noted that SW Strings served a higher number of students than in past years by enrolling more students and retaining many through April. In fact, a greater number of students completed the 2012-13 school year than enrolled in string instrument lessons for the 2011-12 school year. One contributor to the decreased retention rate may be the successful recruitment of a wider array of students, students who were willing to try playing an instrument but in some cases, less likely to persist through the year.

SYSO currently does not have the data for a standard comparison against which to assess their retention rate. The schools with the lowest retention rate (Roxhill, West Seattle, Highland Park) also have less instruction time and higher percentages of students from low-income families. These factors create barriers to success, as students have less time during school to learn the foundation of playing an instrument and move past the initial frustration that comes when learning to play an instrument. Past interviews reveal that youth in these schools often have to take care of younger siblings while parents are at work and are sometimes discouraged from practicing at home, as the sound can be bothersome to other family members. The Seattle Public Schools K-12 Music Coach suggested that a better comparison might be the three schools in Southeast Seattle that have similar free or reduced lunch rates; the retention rate for students at these schools is 64%.

When interpreting retention rates, it is also important to note that family support and teacher style impact student retention and are out of SYSO's control. In the past, the EIM has prioritized a high retention rate and actively sought out the re-enrollment of students who dropped out. One coach reports that a new EIM at six of the seven SW Strings elementary schools is more focused on developing high quality musicians than providing all students with access to musical education, and does not actively work to re-enroll students who drop. This tension between quality and accessibility is a persistent challenge in art education programs with a social justice value.

*Sometimes we lose students because of a lack of parental involvement. The EIM encouraged some kids to drop because they weren't taking it seriously. – SW Strings Coach*

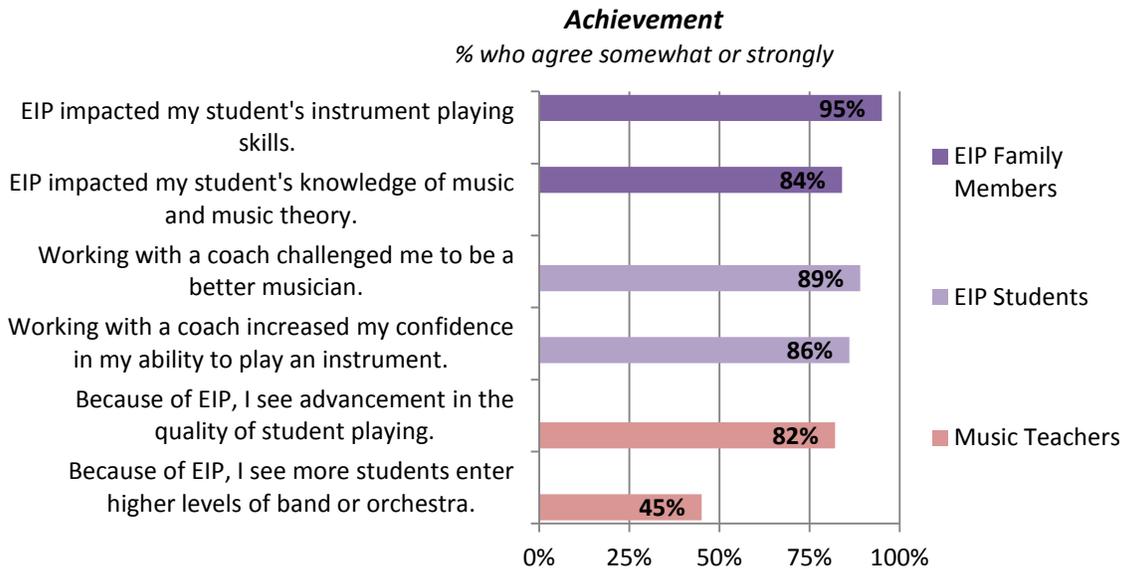
## Achievement

### **SYSO in the Schools supports students advancing to higher-level music classes and repertoire.**

Students appreciate the one-on-one instruction provided by an expert on their particular instrument from *SYSO in the Schools*. They believe that this allows them to more quickly develop skills and technique. Almost nine out of ten (89%) EIP students agree that working with their coach challenged them to be a better musician. After attending a SW Strings spring concert, Pam Ivezic, the SPS K-12 District Music coach, commented that, *“This year I thought that the West Seattle Elementary strings students sounded phenomenal at their year end concert. Considering that the students at WSE had not received EIM instruction for two years, their string technique, intonation and ability to play together as an ensemble was much better than one would expect after only one year of instruction. I believe that this is due in large part to the partnership between the EIM teacher and the SYSO coaches.”*

*I learned a lot more [in EIP] than in my [music] classes. Usually, other students take private lessons but I don't so it was a good experience. – EIP Student*

*Kids who were in jeopardy of not developing the needed skills have made tremendous progress. I could not accomplish this on my own because of the number of students and the level of their needs. – SW Strings Orchestra Teacher*



**SYSO encourages students to engage with music outside of the school day.**

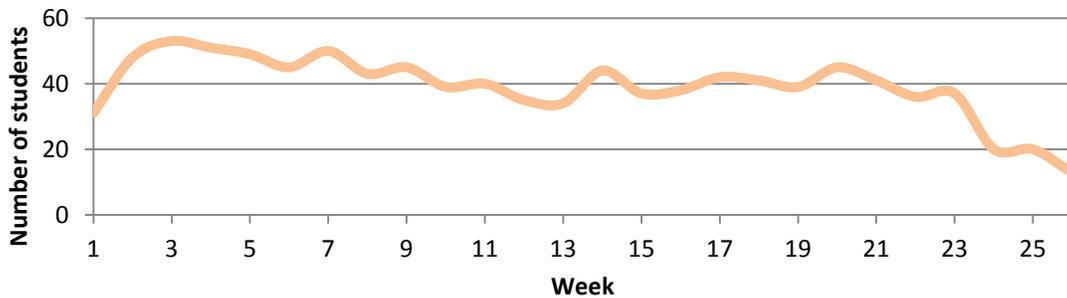
By providing multiple opportunities to play an instrument outside of music classes, SYSO encourages students to continue to develop their musical instrument skills and achieve higher levels of performance. Coaches and music teachers agree that the students who participate in these opportunities develop skills at a more accelerated rate than those who do not. Many (39%) EIP students attended the Side-by-Side event where they played alongside SYSO’s Debut Orchestra. Also, elementary students and their families participated in a SW Super String Saturday, where SW Strings students were mentored by and performed with SYSO’s top-level Youth Orchestra. More than 200 students, friends and family attended each of these *SYSO in the Schools* weekend performance events.

*This event [Side-by-Side] is excellent. SYSO should continue this and connection to the school. We need more opportunities outside of school.*  
 – EIP Family Member

Students in SW Strings also participated in weekly practice opportunities before school or at the West Seattle Community Orchestra (WSCO) practice. Twenty-one of the 57 WSCO string players (37%) in their two beginning level orchestras (Debut and Intermediate) attend one of SW Strings schools. Additionally, 43% of students in SW Strings attended ten or more of the before school practice sessions. Attendance was highest in the beginning of the school year, tending to drop off towards the last weeks. In general, schools with the highest average attendance at before school coaching (Sanislo, Gatewood, Arbor Heights) also had the highest student retention rate for the in-school instrumental music classes. The exception to this is Concord; students attended an average of only six weeks of before school coaching, but had an overall retention rate of 92%.

*The students who come to the extra practice opportunities have more passion, more drive and more love of music.*  
 – SW Strings Coach

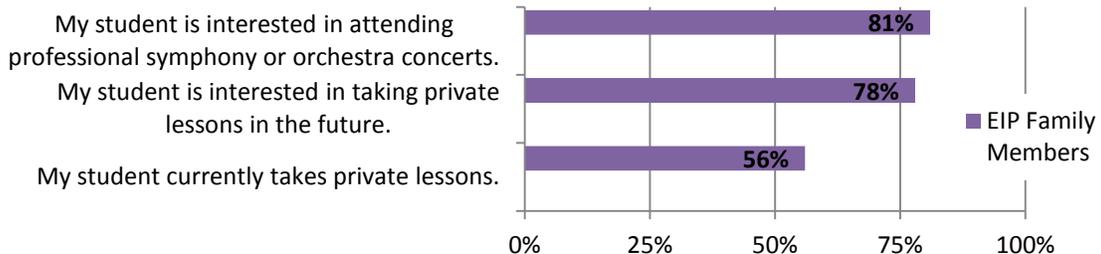
**SW Strings Student Attendance at Before School Coaching**



EIP family members report high levels of student interest in opportunities to engage with their instrument.

**Engagement Beyond School**

*% who agree somewhat or strongly*



## Growth beyond Music

**Studying a musical instrument can nurture social and emotional skills that are transferrable to other areas of a student's life.**

SYSO has identified the following skills and dispositions that can be developed through playing an instrument and working with a coach.

- **Hope and Optimism** – positive beliefs regarding one's future potential, goals and choices
- **Growth Mindset** – belief that intelligence and ability can increase through effort
- **Self-Efficacy** – belief in one's own capabilities and capacity to learn and succeed
- **Sense of Belonging** – perception of acceptance and support in a learning community
- **Collaboration** – learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse backgrounds
- **Communication** – ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert interests, thoughts, emotions, needs and rights – oral, written, multi-media and nonverbal skills

Research suggests that students who possess these skills and dispositions are more likely to experience school and life success.<sup>5</sup> Quantifying and measuring these skills and dispositions is challenging, but this evaluation consistently found qualitative evidence that all parties involved in this project believe SYSO makes a positive impact in this area. The table on the following page presents relevant survey responses from EIP and SW Strings Music Teachers as well as EIP students and family members.

*I can't quantify it and say scores are higher as a result of instrumental music. But I see that kids are engaged in learning, encouraged to succeed and behaving differently. [SYSO coaching] makes a difference.*  
– SW Strings Principal

*There are behavioral benefits when students participate in instrumental music and have youthful, cool music coaches that they look up to. Students begin to think of themselves as musicians and rise to the occasion. – SW Strings Principal*

*[Playing an instrument] helps with patience. You have to work through it and get a lot wrong before you get it right.*  
– EIP Student

*When students perform, I see pride, recognition of the skills they worked to develop, the value of practice, and students taking risks. During performances you get the sense of the cumulative impact of the work they did all year.*  
– SW Strings Principal

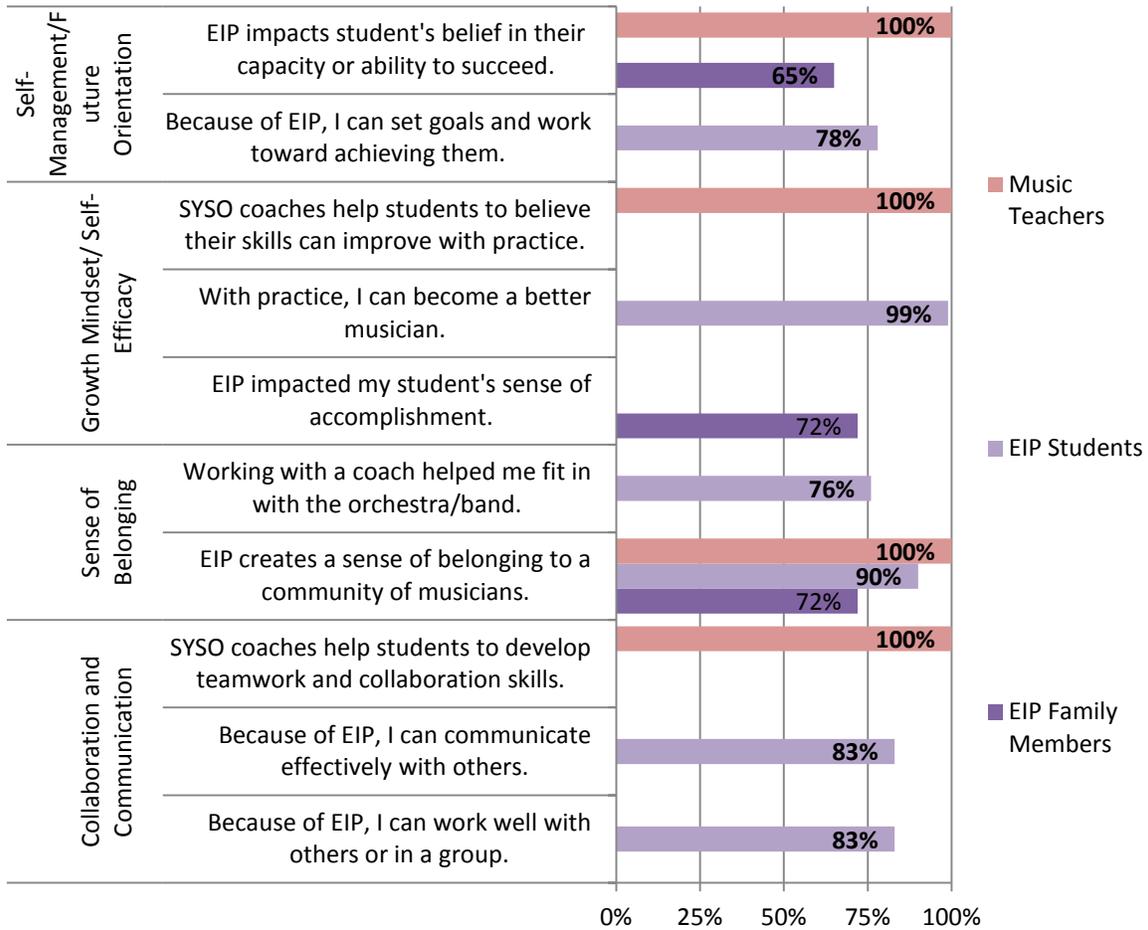
*I have one student that is very talented, but his family cannot afford private lessons. EIP has given him the opportunity to get the instruction he needed to become good at something, which impacts his self-esteem and confidence. – EIP Coach*

*In the beginning of the year many kids were disrespectful. Now when we come around, they are much more open to feedback, sometimes they see us walking around and fix it before we get to them.*  
– SW Strings Coach

<sup>5</sup> Youth Development Executives of King County (October, 2012). Part One: Skills & Dispositions That Support Success in School. *Developed in Collaboration with the Road Map Project.*

### Growth Beyond Music

% who agree somewhat or strongly

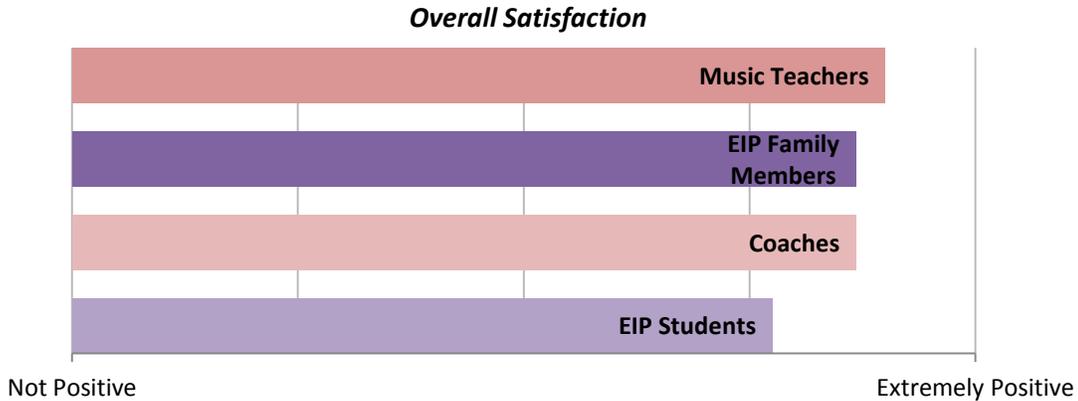


Music teachers, family members and student themselves provide insight into which skills and dispositions SYSO most ably fosters.

- EIP students agreed most strongly that SYSO helps them develop a growth mindset. These students also agreed that their EIP experience helped them to develop a sense of belonging and collaboration/communication skills.
- Music teachers were most likely to agree that SYSO coaching helps students develop important skills and dispositions, with unanimous agreement with survey statements related to growth mindset, future orientation, sense of belonging, teamwork and collaboration.
- EIP family members were slightly less likely to agree with the same or similar statements.

## Program Quality

Overall program satisfaction remains high for students, coaches, music teachers and family members.



Those involved with *SYSO in the Schools* generally rate their experience as positive.

Though the question was phrased differently on the SW Strings family survey, 100% of family members agreed that their child enjoys playing an instrument. Program strengths that enable such high levels of satisfaction include:

- **One-on-one attention.** By providing individualized or small group support for beginning musicians, *SYSO in the Schools* helps to combat the initial frustration that students feel when learning an instrument. This encourages more students to play an instrument, increased commitment to that instrument and a higher level of skill development for each student.
- **Expert musicians.** SYSO coaches are highly skilled musicians in their own right. This means that students are not just getting music lessons; they are learning proper technique and theory from experienced music professionals, ensuring that they are getting a high quality lesson from every coach. SYSO also maintains regular contact with music teachers to monitor coach performance and address any concerns.

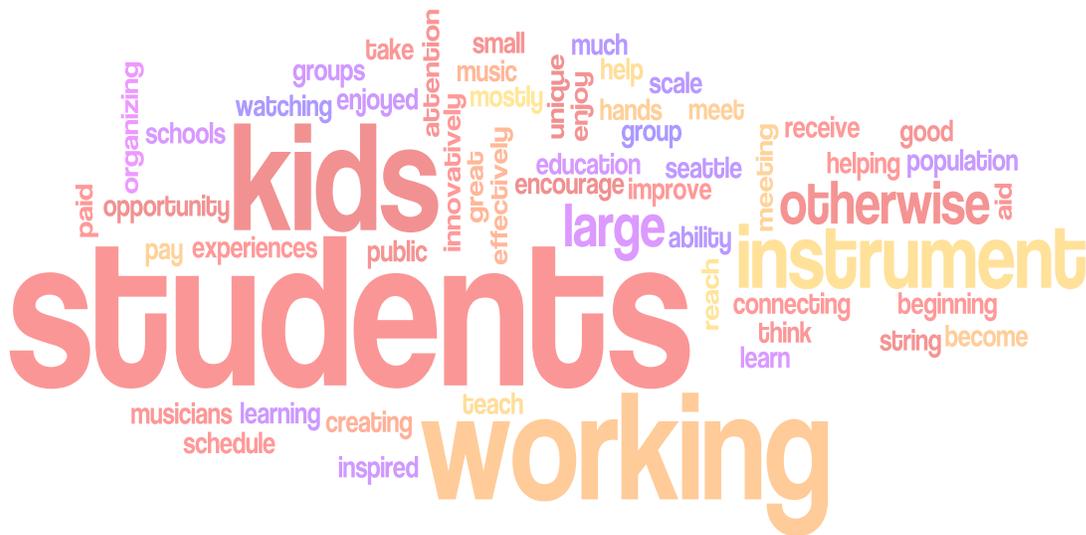
*SYSO coaches verbally coach the students, providing specific feedback on good and bad playing habits, rather than just saying 'good job.' This is a skill I work on with my teachers, that matters for learning.*

– SW Strings Principal

*The EIP staff keeps getting better and better. I'm not sure how that's happening but it IS!*

– EIP Music Teacher

- **High coach satisfaction.** All (100%) coaches report that their experience was satisfying, either somewhat or a great deal. They enjoy the opportunity to work with children and to foster students' engagement in learning to play the instrument that they coach. Many coaches appreciate the fact that the students they work with might not otherwise receive individualized music lessons. This high job satisfaction and enjoyment on behalf of the coaches translates into a high quality program experience. The word cloud graphic on the next page represents coach survey responses to the question, "What are three things you like about being a SYSO coach?"



Additionally, SYSO made changes to the program this year as a part of their commitment to continuous quality improvement. The following program improvements contributed to increased satisfaction this year:

- Planning time for SW Strings coaches and music teachers.** This year, SYSO paid coaches to incorporate regular planning time with music teachers into their schedules. At the elementary school level, planning time was scheduled for a specific time, while at Denny International Middle School, increased time in between classes allowed coaches to speak to the music teacher after each class. In both cases, this allowed the coaches to determine classroom management strategies with the music teacher and to communicate about classroom goals and individual student progress. This increased commitment towards communication between the coach and music teacher led to higher overall program satisfaction.

*Having the opportunity to sit down with everyone and get on the same page and bringing ideas out helped to bring cohesion into the educational outcomes.*  
 – SW Strings EIM Teacher

- Clarifying EIP goals.** While EIP coaches do not have dedicated planning time with each music teacher, SYSO has taken steps to improve communication among coaches and music teachers and to increase accountability and consistency of coach schedules. SYSO also provided music teachers and coaches with a checklist that outlines classroom strategy for the year and identifies the three priorities of the EIP:

  - 1) Foundational skills and technique development
  - 2) Preparation for annual EIP Side-by-Side concert
  - 3) Preparation for school performances

## Next Steps and Conclusion

### Next Steps

**SYSO has additional opportunities to strengthen and improve *SYSO in the Schools*.**

SYSO may want to consider the following opportunities for continuous quality improvement.

- **Communication with/support for families.** Though SYSO's cooperative agreement with Seattle Public Schools limits their direct interaction with families of *SYSO in the Schools* students, SYSO recognizes that families often play a pivotal role in supporting the success of their child's instrumental music education. Consistent with past years, this year's interviews with principals, music teachers, coaches and families uncovered suggestions for how SYSO might provide education and resources to families to better foster student engagement and perseverance in instrument lessons. As the *SYSO in the Schools* partnership is currently defined, SYSO's role is limited to interactions with students, so SYSO cannot act on some of these suggestions. SYSO should determine if the partnership roles should be renegotiated with the district to expand SYSO's role to include family engagement and/or explore alternate methods of supporting families through student interactions.

*They need to get their information out there better. The general communication from SYSO needs improvement.*  
– EIP Family Member
- **Maximizing instruction time.** SW Strings elementary schools get 50 minutes of coaching before school and one hour during school with two coaches each week. At Denny International Middle School, two coaches attend Beginning, Junior and Senior Orchestra classes twice per week. This system works well for students, as coaches are present in every elementary school and many middle school orchestra classes. EIP Schools generally are allotted 30 hours of coaching time per instrument per year; however students consistently ask for more coaching time and a more consistent coach schedule. SYSO leaves it up to the coach and music teacher to decide how to focus instruction time on individual students. To maximize the impact of EIP coaches, SYSO should explore ways to provide each school with additional coach hours within the limited program budget..

*The music coaches are quick to physically touch students, moving their hand into a correct position on a bow, for instance. In school culture, teachers don't touch students. Our instructor had to talk with the coaches about boundaries and how they can teach instrumental lessons while fitting with the school culture.* – SW Strings Principal
- **Professional development for coaches.** This year, coaches attended a three-hour training on Cultural Competency and Awareness for Music Instructors. At least half of the coaches indicated interest in additional professional development opportunities including classroom management strategies (71%), master classes with guest musicians (59%), learning more about teaching techniques (59%) and learning more about cultural competency (53%). Principals believe that classroom management, cultural competence and school norms and culture are important topics to address during training.

- **Explicitly name skills and dispositions of focus.** Principals are quick to report their belief that music engagement fosters important skills and dispositions among their students, including patience, appropriate risk-taking and the relationship between effort (practice) and outcome (performance). One principal suggests that the program would be strengthened if coaches explicitly “*named, described and coached students to practice these creative habits and skill sets,*” as this would help students recognize how habits they use in music lessons can be useful in other areas of school and life.

*I suggest that SYSO coaches speak more explicitly about what they want students to get out of the program, where that’s the value of practice, or risk-taking, or perseverance. If students hear those messages over and over, they learn them. SYSO coaches should say these things out loud.*  
– SW Strings Principal

**Principals suggest that SYSO strengthen its visibility to foster program sustainability.**

- **Initiate communication with principals.** While principals are very aware of how busy they are and appreciate partners who are not unnecessarily demanding, they believe SYSO should take the lead on establishing regular contact with them. One principal suggested that in order for SYSO to best advocate for their program, they should “reach out to the principal once or twice a year, schedule a 20 minute sit-down with the EIM and principal, make a plan together at the beginning of the year and debrief towards the end.”
- **Foster visibility in the community.** Principals greatly value the services SYSO provides but acknowledge that parents and the larger community might not realize SYSO’s role or give credit to SYSO for their contributions to the school’s music program. One principal suggested that SYSO make efforts to be more visible to the families of the students it serves through music-related handouts. Also, this principal believes SYSO should get the word out to the community by regularly describing its work on neighborhood listservs and newsletters.

[When thinking about funding and sustainability] *Visibility in the larger community matters. SYSO could provide more posters, handouts, free tickets, to increase their visibility to parents and in the community . [They could continue to provide us] verbiage for websites and neighborhood blogs touting our instrumental music program and the partnership with the school.*  
– SW Strings Principal

**Conclusion**

This evaluation finds ample evidence that *SYSO in the Schools* is achieving its goal of increasing access to music instruction for youth least likely to have access to instrument lessons during or outside of school, through its SW String Project. This evaluation also finds evidence that the EIP program successfully fosters engagement with and perseverance in the study of endangered instruments. As a result, SYSO is becoming a highly-valued school partner while helping to build the capacity of public school orchestra and band programs throughout Seattle and Greater King County.