

All-State: Meet the All-State Orchestra Director – Allen Tinkham

Allen Tinkham is the artistic director and conductor of the Chicago Youth Symphony. He was also this year's All-State Orchestra conductor. He spoke with MNSOTA members about his youth symphonies in Chicago and about his perspectives on leading young orchestral musicians.



M i n n e s o t a orchestra teachers asked Tinkham how he communicates with school orchestra teachers and how to deal with school conflicts as well as students' conflicts due their busy lives. Tinkham said you have to be egoless and compromise. Many of

the conflicts he has had to deal with were because of situations he

didn't know about; therefore communication is essential.

When talking about rehearsal techniques, Tinkham spoke about the necessity of being completely honest and always giving a reason for his actions. He seemed to have well-defined goals and strategies for working with students and families to ensure that they are successful. He said just saying "because I said so" will not teach students anything or build trust. He also said that being brutally honest was being respectful and in fact showing students that you care—letting students know that something was not good, but also letting them know that they are there to improve.

He suggested some basic rules for rehearsal, such as: working with everyone; balance work and play; work every section to give others a break; and ask lots of questions. He suggested walking around to the various sections to keep them engaged. He believes that the conductor should really conduct—they will learn to follow. If they do not, stop and tell them, then go back and work to change it. The musicians need to trust the conductor enough that they want to go with the conductor.

When programming a concert Tinkham does not like to create obvious themes like nationalism or impressionism and doesn't like a program to sound all the same. Instead he looks for meaningful connections that require a deep knowledge of the composers and the circumstances that lead to each piece's creation. †