Jazz: A Music of Privilege?

School Funding Adequacy, Race, Poverty, and Access to Nationally Prominent High School Jazz Programs

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Abstract

Nationally prominent high school jazz programs are concentrated in districts that are better funded, less poor, and less Black and Hispanic than the labor markets around them. We assembled 446 award appearances by 121 programs from the DownBeat Student Music Awards (2011–2014 and 2017–2020) and Jazz at Lincoln Center's Essentially Ellington competition (finalists, 2009–2026). We matched public schools to district finance measures from the National Education Cost Model (NECM) and to school enrollment from the NCES Common Core of Data. All comparisons are to each school's own labor market.

The median winning traditional public high school sits in a district funded at 1.13 times the adequacy of its labor market, and 61 of 79 winning districts are funded above their labor-market average. The median winner enrolls 24 percent low-income students against 41 percent across its labor market's high schools, and 25 percent Black and Hispanic students against 36 percent. Among districts with 2,000 or more students, those in the top quintile of relative adequacy produce winners at 3.4 times the rate of the bottom quintile. Those in the lowest quintile of relative child poverty produce winners at 4.2 times the rate of the highest. Funding, race and poverty are tightly bundled. In multivariate models, relative poverty carries most of the signal, and adequacy matters most when comparing districts within the same state.

Public arts magnets are a distinct pathway. They sit in poorer, less adequately funded urban districts (median 0.87 times labor-market adequacy), win 19 of 47 Essentially Ellington podium places, and enroll fewer low-income students than their labor markets. Outside the arts-magnet sector, competitive jazz education is to a substantial degree an amenity of relatively advantaged districts. Democratizing it depends in part on bringing high-need districts to adequacy relative to their labor markets.

We also traced the high schools of 85 U.S.-raised DownBeat Critics Poll winners under 65 (Rising Star winners 2016–2026 and main-poll winners 2016–2022). The professional pipeline has shifted. Musicians born 1961–1979 who came through neighborhood public high schools mostly attended schools poorer than their region. Among those born 1980 or later whose high school is known, 21 of 28 came through public arts magnets. Most of those magnets enroll far fewer low-income students than the surrounding region (median 27 percent against 55 percent). Jazz in American schools is increasingly a music of privilege or of selection.

Keywords: school finance; funding adequacy; music education; jazz; arts access; educational equity

JEL codes: H75, I22, I24, Z11

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1. Introduction

Jazz is an American art form assembled from many traditions: African American blues, spirituals and ragtime, New Orleans brass bands, Afro-Cuban and Caribbean rhythm, and European harmony. It has long been celebrated as a democratic music, open to anyone with an instrument and something to say. School jazz programs are one of the main ways that openness is supposed to reach young people. Yet the high school programs that win national competitions are found mostly in districts that are whiter, less poor and better funded than their neighbors. This paper documents that pattern, traces where today's leading players went to high school, and asks whether jazz in American schools has become a music of privilege, how much of that runs through school funding, and what it would take to democratize serious jazz education.

Competitive jazz programs depend on resources that school finance shapes directly. They need a specialist director, often with a second staff member for combos or vocal jazz. They need instruments that families cannot be expected to buy (string bass, drum kit, baritone saxophone, vibraphone), rehearsal time inside the school day, and money for festival travel and entry fees. They also need a feeder pipeline of middle school bands. A district with more resources than its cost pressures require can carry these as part of a broad curriculum. A district below adequacy is more likely to treat them as expendable.

The analysis parallels our earlier work on access to advanced mathematics coursework, where relative funding adequacy predicted the availability of AP math. Here the outcome is not course access but national prominence: repeated recognition by the two most widely followed school jazz competitions in the United States. We ask three questions:

1. Are districts with nationally prominent jazz programs funded more adequately than other districts in their labor market?
2. Do these schools and districts enroll smaller shares of Black, Hispanic and low-income students than their labor markets?
3. How much prominence comes through traditional neighborhood high schools, as opposed to public arts magnets, private schools and tuition-based community programs?
4. Where did today's most acclaimed U.S.-raised jazz musicians go to high school, and has that changed

across generations?

We compare each school and district to its own labor market rather than to national averages. That keeps the comparisons within the same regional wages, housing costs and demographic mix. A district's position relative to its neighbors is also what shapes its competitive standing for teachers, and for the families who choose districts partly on their amenities.

2. Background

Three literatures meet here: who takes part in school music, whether money buys educational opportunity, and how to compare district resources fairly across places.

Who participates in school music. Students in large high school ensembles are not a cross-section of American students. Using the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, Elpus and Abril (2011) found that about 21 percent of the class of 2004 took part in school ensembles. White students, students in the top socioeconomic quartile and children of parents with advanced degrees were overrepresented. Hispanic students, English learners and students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile were underrepresented. Their national profile of the 2009–2013 cohort (Elpus & Abril, 2019) revisits these patterns with the High School Longitudinal Study. Federal surveys of arts instruction have also found less arts access in high-poverty schools (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). These studies measure participation. We look at the top end, where programs reach national competitive standing, and connect it to district finance.

Whether money matters. Studies using court-ordered and legislative school finance reforms find that more spending raises educational attainment and adult earnings, with larger effects for low-income children (Jackson, Johnson & Persico, 2016; Lafortune, Rothstein & Schanzenbach, 2018). Much of that money goes to staffing. Elective programs such as instrumental music are among the first cut when budgets tighten and among the first restored when they recover (Baker, 2018). Jazz programs are therefore a plausible place for funding differences to show up as visible differences in opportunity.

Measuring adequacy relative to place. Nominal per-pupil spending is a poor guide to opportunity because costs differ with regional wages, scale, population density and student needs. The NECM estimates the per-pupil spending each district would need to reach national-average outcomes, given those cost factors, and divides actual spending by that cost to get an adequacy ratio (Baker, Di Carlo & Weber, annual). Labor

markets follow the Comparable Wage Index geography (Taylor & Fowler, 2006). Comparing a district to its labor market asks whether it is advantaged or disadvantaged relative to the districts it competes with for teachers and families.

3. Data

The analysis links 446 award appearances to district finance and school enrollment records. Table 1 lists the sources.

Table 1. Data sources

Source	Content used	Years
DownBeat Student Music Awards	High School and Performing Arts High School ensemble awards (large jazz ensemble, small combo, large vocal jazz, small vocal jazz, Latin group), Winner and Outstanding Performance	2011–2014, 2017–2020
Essentially Ellington (Jazz at Lincoln Center)	National finalists (14–27 U.S. bands a year) and first- through third-place finishes	2009–2026; no placings in the virtual 2020–2021 festivals
National Education Cost Model (SFID)	Current spending per pupil, modeled cost of national-average outcomes, % Black and Hispanic enrollment, Census SAIPE child poverty, labor-market identifiers	2009–2024
NCES Common Core of Data (Urban Institute Education Data Portal)	School enrollment by race; free and reduced-price lunch, or direct certification where FRL is not reported	2021–22

Award sources. DownBeat's Student Music Awards are judged from submitted recordings, with separate divisions for comprehensive high schools and performing arts high schools. We took ensemble awards from DownBeat's published results for the eight years whose full results we could retrieve from its digital archive. The 2009–2010, 2015–2016 and 2021–2026 results were not retrievable. Essentially Ellington selects finalists from recorded submissions of Ellington repertoire and brings them to New York for a live competition. We used Jazz at Lincoln Center's finalist announcements and results releases for all 18 years. International bands and Canadian finalists are excluded. We count an *appearance* as one DownBeat ensemble award or one Essentially Ellington finalist year.

Program typology. Each program was assigned to one of four types:

- **Traditional public:** neighborhood or open-enrollment comprehensive high schools, including selective academic magnets without an arts admission process. 83 schools.
- **Arts magnet:** public schools, district-run or charter, that admit by arts audition or application, such as Dillard Center for the Arts, New World School of the Arts, Booker T. Washington HSPVA, Denver

School of the Arts and Dreyfoos School of the Arts. 17 schools.

- **Private:** independent and religious schools, such as Newark Academy, Harvard-Westlake and Valley Christian. 5 schools.
- **Community program:** tuition- or donation-funded youth ensembles not tied to one school, such as Tucson Jazz Institute, Jazz House Kids, Triangle Youth Jazz Ensemble, the Jazzschool and the Colburn School. 16 programs.

Only traditional public schools and arts magnets can be linked to district finance. Private schools and community programs are described but not modeled.

Finance and demographics. Public schools were matched to NCES school IDs by fuzzy name and city matching within state, with manual review of every match. District measures are 2009–2024 averages from the NECM file. School measures come from the 2021–22 CCD. Five schools could not be linked to NECM district records: three New York City schools and Memphis Central, whose districts the file does not contain, and the county-run Los Angeles County High School for the Arts.

Critics Poll winners. We listed every DownBeat Critics Poll Rising Star category winner from 2016 through 2022 (the full category lists published on downbeat.com), the headline Rising Star winners for 2023–2026, and main-poll category winners from 2016 through 2022. We kept musicians born in 1961 or later and raised mainly in the United States: 85 people. For each we recorded hometown and high school from published biographies, mostly Wikipedia with interviews where Wikipedia was silent. A high school is recorded only when a source names it. Public schools were matched to the 2021–22 CCD and to NECM district records in the same way as the competition winners.

4. Methods

Every measure is expressed relative to the enrollment-weighted average of the school's or district's labor market, so the comparisons stay within one regional economy.

District measures. For district d in labor market m and year t, the adequacy ratio is current spending per pupil divided by the NECM's modeled cost of national-average outcomes (enrollment-weighted mean 0.94 in 2019). Relative adequacy is that ratio divided by the labor market's enrollment-weighted mean:

$$\text{RelAdeq}_{dt} = \frac{\text{Spend}_{dt}/\text{Cost}_{dt}}{\sum_{j \in m} w_{jt} \left(\text{Spend}_{jt}/\text{Cost}_{jt}\right)}$$

Relative race and poverty are percentage-point gaps from the labor-market mean: percent Black plus Hispanic enrollment, and the Census SAIPE poverty rate for children aged 5–17. Each is computed by year and averaged over 2009–2024. The analytic universe is 11,029 districts that enroll high school students and sit in labor markets with at least two districts. Broward, Palm Beach and Volusia counties in Florida and Clark County, Nevada are each their own labor market, so their relative fiscal position is undefined. The five winning schools in those counties are excluded from the fiscal comparisons.

School measures. For each winning school we compute the percent Black plus Hispanic and percent low-income in 2021–22. Low-income is free or reduced-price lunch, or direct certification in states where most schools do not report FRL (Massachusetts, among others). We compare each school with the enrollment-weighted mean of all high schools with 100 or more students in its labor market, and report its unweighted percentile rank among those schools.

Models. At the district level we estimate logit models of whether a district has any traditional public award appearance:

$$\Pr(\text{Win}_d = 1) = \Lambda(\beta_1 \,\text{RelAdeq}_d + \beta_2 \,\text{RelBH}_d + \beta_3 \,\text{RelPov}_d + \gamma_1 \ln \text{Enroll}_d + \gamma_2 \ln \text{LMEnroll}_m + \alpha_s)$$

Relative adequacy is scaled in units of 0.10, and race and poverty in 10-point units. Log district and labor-market enrollment control for the fact that larger systems field more ensembles and have more chances to enter. One specification adds state fixed effects α_s and is restricted to the 7,476 districts in states with at least one winner. Standard errors are clustered by labor market. We also fit Poisson models of appearance counts and repeat the main logit with the NECM's higher outcome target.

5. Results

5.1 The award landscape

Traditional public high schools account for most appearances, but arts magnets and community programs take most of the top prizes (Table 2). Arts magnets are 14 percent of programs and hold 40 percent of Essentially Ellington podium places.

Table 2. Award appearances by program type, 2009–2026

Program type	Programs	DownBeat awards	EE finalist years	All appearances	EE top-three finishes
Traditional public	83	88	194	282	16
Arts magnet	17	46	49	95	19
Community program	16	18	35	53	10
Private	5	7	9	16	2
Total	**121**	**159**	**287**	**446**	**47**

Note: The 47 podium places are 16 years × 3, less one 2025 place won by a Spanish band.

5.2 The most prominent programs

Twelve programs have 10 or more appearances (Table 3). Nine are traditional public schools, and six of those nine enroll a much smaller low-income share than their labor market. The two competitions reach somewhat different schools. Folsom's 17 appearances are all DownBeat awards; Roosevelt, Beloit Memorial and Garfield appear only through Essentially Ellington.

Table 3. Programs with 10 or more appearances

Program	Type	Appear.	EE podiums	Low-income %, school / LM	Black + Hisp. %, school / LM
Folsom HS, Folsom, CA	Traditional public	17	0	12 / 39	17 / 37
Rio Americano HS, Sacramento, CA	Traditional public	17	0	28 / 39	22 / 37
Roosevelt HS, Seattle, WA	Traditional public	16	5	15 / 38	13 / 28
New World School of the Arts, Miami, FL	Arts magnet	14	3	33 / 53	77 / 91
Beloit Memorial HS, Beloit, WI	Traditional public	13	0	66 / 43	59 / 24
Foxborough HS, Foxborough, MA	Traditional public	11	3	21 / 19	17 / 11
Agoura HS, Agoura Hills, CA	Traditional public	11	1	26 / 65	16 / 44
Dillard Center for the Arts, Fort Lauderdale, FL	Arts magnet	11	7	80 / 54	96 / 76
Garfield HS, Seattle, WA	Traditional public	11	2	40 / 38	37 / 28
Sun Prairie HS, Sun Prairie, WI	Traditional public	10	0	23 / 30	21 / 22
Booker T. Washington HSPVA, Dallas, TX	Arts magnet	10	0	27 / 54	55 / 59
Byron Center HS, Byron Center, MI	Traditional public	10	0	21 / 45	12 / 28

Note: CCD 2021–22. LM = enrollment-weighted mean of labor-market high schools. Foxborough's low-income figure is direct certification. Just below the cutoff are two community programs: Tucson Jazz Institute (9 appearances, 6 podiums including three first places) and Triangle Youth Jazz Ensemble (9).

5.3 Traditional public winners compared with their labor markets

On every measure, the typical traditional public winner is advantaged relative to its labor market (Table 4). The fiscal gap is in the district; the largest compositional gap is in the school itself.

Table 4. Traditional public winners relative to their labor markets (medians)

Measure	Winner	Labor market	Winners on the advantaged side
District adequacy, ratio to LM	1.13	1.00	61 of 79 above LM
District % Black + Hispanic, gap from LM	−8.1 pts	—	53 of 79 below LM
District child poverty, gap from LM	−3.7 pts	—	64 of 79 below LM
School % low-income	24.1	41.2	58 of 73 below LM
School % Black + Hispanic	25.1	36.1	56 of 80 below LM

Weighted by appearances, winning traditional public schools are about 56 percent white, 26 percent Black or Hispanic, and 29 percent low-income. Across all high schools in the 27 states that produced winners, the enrollment-weighted figures are 43 percent Black or Hispanic and 49 percent low-income.

5.4 Gradients across all districts

The pattern holds across the full distribution of districts, not just among winners. Among the 4,258 districts with 2,000 or more students, the share producing a winner rises steadily with relative adequacy and falls with relative poverty and relative Black and Hispanic enrollment (Figure 1).

The poverty gradient is the steepest. The race gradient is flatter and not strictly monotonic in the full sample, consistent with the multivariate results below.

5.5 Multivariate models

Each measure predicts winning on its own, but they are too closely bundled to separate cleanly (Table 5). With size controls only, an extra 0.10 of relative adequacy raises the odds of having a winner by 16 percent. Ten points more Black and Hispanic enrollment than the labor market lowers them by 17 percent, and ten points more child poverty lowers them by 52 percent.

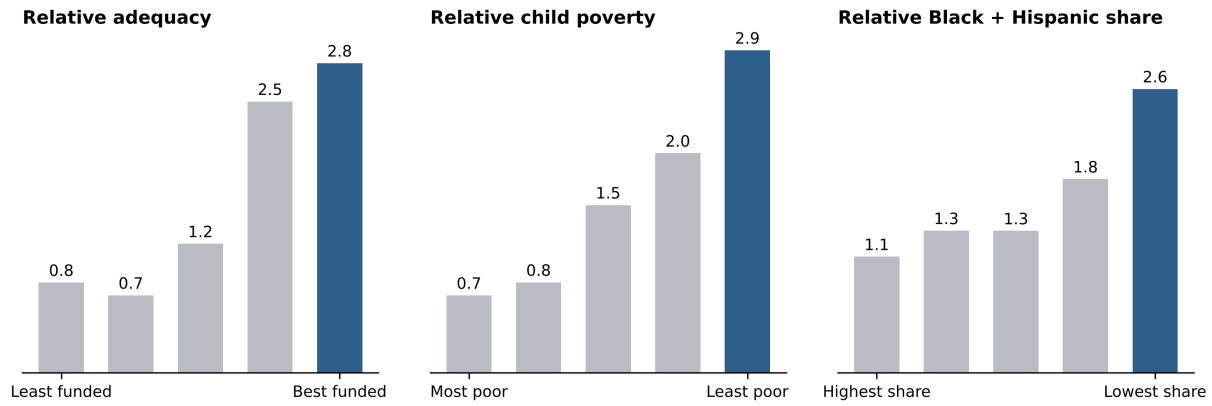


Figure 1. Winning districts per 100, by quintile of advantage relative to the labor market. Most versus least advantaged quintile: adequacy 3.4×, poverty 4.2×, Black + Hispanic share 2.4×. Source: NECM 2009–2024 district averages; 4,258 districts with 2,000+ students and high school enrollment; award data compiled for this paper.

Table 5. Logit models of having a traditional public winner (odds ratios, p-values in parentheses)

Predictor	Each alone, with size controls	All three	All three + state fixed effects
+0.10 relative adequacy	1.16 (<.001)	1.07 (.35)	1.17 (.02)
+10 pts Black + Hispanic vs. LM	0.83 (.006)	1.03 (.77)	1.08 (.43)
+10 pts child poverty vs. LM	0.48 (.001)	0.57 (.06)	0.56 (.10)
ln district enrollment	about 2.5	2.52 (<.001)	3.69 (<.001)
ln labor-market enrollment	about 1.3	1.33 (.09)	1.16 (.30)
Winners / districts	70 / 11,029	70 / 11,029	70 / 7,476

Note: Standard errors clustered by labor market.

When all three enter together, the race coefficient goes to zero and poverty keeps most of its size. Adequacy loses significance across all states but returns once state fixed effects are added (OR 1.17, p = .02). Within a state, districts that are better funded than their neighbors are more likely to field national-level programs, holding race and poverty constant. Across states, adequacy is confounded with state-level differences in program culture and competition entry. Poisson models of appearance counts point the same way but are imprecise (adequacy IRR 1.10, p = .24; poverty IRR 0.88, p = .67), because a handful of programs account for many appearances. With the NECM's higher outcome target, the joint adequacy odds ratio is unchanged at 1.07 (p = .35).

5.6 Sorting within labor markets and districts

District averages understate how advantaged the winning schools are. The median winning school ranks at the 27th percentile of its labor market's high schools on low-income share, so roughly three in four nearby

high schools are poorer. On Black and Hispanic share it ranks at the 47th percentile. The race gap in Table 4 is therefore mainly a contrast with large, heavily Black and Hispanic urban high schools; the poverty gap shows up against almost every school in the region.

Seattle shows the within-district version. Roosevelt High School (15 percent low-income, 13 percent Black or Hispanic) and Garfield High School (40 percent and 37 percent) are both in Seattle Public Schools, so district finance cannot tell them apart. The Seattle labor market averages 38 percent and 28 percent. Roosevelt has 16 Essentially Ellington finals and five podium finishes. Garfield, in the historically Black Central District, has 11 finals and two first places (2009 and 2010).

5.7 Arts magnets

Arts magnets reverse the district-level pattern while partly reproducing the school-level one. Their districts are poorer and less adequately funded than their labor markets: median relative adequacy 0.87, with 1 of 11 districts above its labor-market average. They are 12 points more Black and Hispanic, and 4 points higher in child poverty. Yet the schools themselves enroll fewer low-income students than their labor markets in 7 of 11 cases. The median magnet ranks at the 25th percentile of labor-market high schools on low-income share. Denver School of the Arts enrolls 12 percent low-income students against 44 percent in its labor market.

Arts magnets are where large, under-funded, majority-minority districts concentrate jazz instruction, and they win: 19 of 47 Essentially Ellington podium places. Dillard Center for the Arts, 96 percent Black or Hispanic and 80 percent low-income, has seven podium finishes, including first place in 2011, 2012 and 2018. It is the clearest exception to the pattern in the data.

5.8 Traditional public exceptions

Fifteen of 73 traditional public winners with data enroll a larger low-income share than their labor market. Most do so by a few points (Foxborough, Garfield, Meadowdale, Downey). The substantial exceptions are Beloit Memorial (66 percent low-income against 43 percent; district adequacy 0.70 of its labor market), with 13 Essentially Ellington finals, and single appearances by East St. Louis, MacArthur (Houston), Kingston (NY), Pioneer Valley (Santa Maria, CA) and Temple (TX). Memphis Central, the 2025 Essentially Ellington winner, and Staten Island's Susan E. Wagner, second in 2023, are also high-performing programs in large urban systems, but the NECM file cannot place their districts.

5.9 Where today's acclaimed players went to high school

The professional pipeline has moved from neighborhood high schools, often poor ones, to selective arts magnets that enroll fewer poor students than their regions. Of the 85 Critics Poll winners, sources name a high school for 46 and a hometown district for 5 more (Table 6).

Table 6. High schools of U.S.-raised DownBeat Critics Poll winners, by birth cohort

High school type	Born 1961–1979	Born 1980 or later
Public arts magnet	6	21
Traditional public	9	6
Selective public (Cass Tech)	1	0
Private	2	1
Not named in sources	21	18
Total	**39**	**46**

The older cohort's neighborhood schools look nothing like today's competition winners. Ralph Peterson (Pleasantville HS, NJ), Wycliffe Gordon (Butler HS, Augusta), Gregory Porter (Highland HS, Bakersfield), Jimmy Greene (Bloomfield HS, CT), Johnathan Blake (George Washington HS, Philadelphia) and Terri Lyne Carrington (Medford HS, MA) came from schools that today enroll more low-income students than their regions. Six of the eight older-cohort neighborhood schools with data are poorer than their labor market, at a median of the 77th percentile of regional high schools on low-income share.

The younger cohort came overwhelmingly through 18 different public arts magnets: Houston's HSPVA (Robert Glasper, James Francies), LaGuardia (Lakecia Benjamin, Adam O'Farrill), Douglas Anderson in Jacksonville (Theo Croker, Ulysses Owens Jr., Jamison Ross), Duke Ellington in Washington (Ben Williams), Booker T. Washington in Dallas (Jazzmeia Horn), LACHSA (Gerald Clayton, Kris Bowers) and others. Eleven of the 14 younger-cohort magnets with data enroll fewer low-income students than their region: a median of 27 percent against 55 percent, at the 16th percentile of regional high schools. Several sit in districts well below labor-market adequacy (Houston 0.75, Dallas 0.66, Duval 0.85). The few younger musicians from neighborhood schools mostly came from advantaged ones: John Jay in Katonah-Lewisboro (Nir Felder; adequacy 2.66 times its labor market), New Trier (Aaron Weinstein; 1.86), Berkeley (Ambrose Akinmusire; 1.39) and Montclair (Emmet Cohen). Thundercat (Locke HS, Watts) and Roxy Coss (Garfield, Seattle) are the exceptions.

Four of the five musicians identified only by hometown come from affluent suburbs: Brookline and

Wellesley (Mary Halvorson, Dave Rempis), Canton, Connecticut (Noah Preminger), and Fairport, New York (Vijay Iyer), each funded at 1.2 to 1.7 times its labor market; Port Townsend, Washington (Miles Okazaki) is the exception. The full list is in Appendix B. Low-income shares in districts that offer universal free meals (Philadelphia, Kansas City) are reported as 100 percent and are excluded from these medians.

6. Discussion

Outside the arts-magnet sector, nationally competitive jazz education is mostly an amenity of districts that are advantaged relative to their neighbors, with the schools themselves advantaged further within those districts. The answer to the research question is largely yes, with two qualifications.

First, the advantage is relative, not absolute. Winning schools are not uniformly wealthy or white in national terms. Beloit, Garfield, Downey and Champaign Central are racially diverse, and many winners sit in middle-income suburbs. What sets them apart is their position in their own regional market: more money than cost pressures require, and fewer poor students than the schools around them. That is the position from which a district can sustain a specialist director, a full rhythm section and a feeder program over many years. Most repeat winners appear across a decade or more.

Second, race and poverty cannot be separated in these data. Relative poverty is the stronger predictor once both are in the model, but the two are highly correlated across districts, and a design with 70 winners cannot cleanly separate them. The defensible statement is that jazz prominence tracks a bundle of fiscal and demographic advantage. It is not that race does not matter.

The arts-magnet pattern is the policy-relevant counterpoint. Large urban districts that are under-funded relative to their suburbs produce some of the nation's best programs, but mostly by concentrating instruction in one audition-based school. That model delivers excellence, and some magnets such as Dillard serve predominantly Black and low-income students. It also confines serious jazz study to a few hundred students per district, often less poor than the district as a whole, while comprehensive high schools across the same city go without. Tuition-based community programs, which took 10 of 47 Essentially Ellington podium places, are a further private substitute for what well-resourced districts provide in school.

The Critics Poll evidence adds a generational turn to this picture. A generation ago, a working-class neighborhood high school in Augusta, Bakersfield or Pleasantville could still produce a major jazz musician.

For players born since 1980, the route runs mostly through audition-based arts magnets that enroll far fewer poor students than their regions, or through affluent suburban districts such as Katonah-Lewisboro, New Trier, Wellesley and Greenwich (Appendix A). Jazz has not become a music of wealth in any simple sense: many of these magnets are majority Black and Hispanic and sit in under-funded urban districts. But access to serious training now depends heavily on either residential advantage or winning a selective seat, which is a narrower door than the neighborhood band room it replaced.

For school finance policy, the implication matches the AP math findings. Programs that look discretionary, such as advanced coursework, ensembles and specialist teachers, are where relative fiscal advantage becomes visible opportunity. Bringing high-need districts to adequacy relative to their labor markets is a precondition for distributing that opportunity more evenly. Without it, serious study of a music built from so many communities' traditions will continue to depend on living in a relatively affluent district or winning an audition seat. Democratizing jazz education is, in large part, a school finance problem.

7. Limitations and next steps

The estimates describe who wins, not who teaches jazz, and several features of the data bias in known directions.

- **Entry is self-selected.** Both competitions require a recording, and DownBeat charges an entry fee. Districts without the resources to record and enter are invisible here even if they have strong programs, so the measured gradient partly reflects capacity to compete.
- **DownBeat coverage is incomplete.** Only 8 of 18 years were retrievable. Adding 2009–2010, 2015–2016 and 2021–2026, from library holdings or DownBeat directly, would roughly double the DownBeat sample.
- **District finance for school programs.** Adequacy is measured at the district level, and within-district allocation (Roosevelt versus Garfield) is unobserved. School-level spending reports under ESSA could close this gap from 2018–19 onward.
- **Snapshot demographics.** School composition is from 2021–22, while awards span 2009–2026. Low-income measures differ across states (FRL, direct certification, community eligibility), although each comparison stays within one labor market.
- **Missing districts.** New York City, Memphis–Shelby County and four single-district labor markets in

Florida and Nevada drop out of the fiscal comparisons. Several of them host prominent arts magnets or urban exceptions, so their omission likely makes the arts-magnet fiscal pattern less precise rather than reversing it.

- **Broader outcome.** A natural extension is an outcome that does not depend on entering competitions: whether a high school offers a jazz ensemble at all, from state course-enrollment files or the Civil Rights Data Collection where available, modeled on the same relative-adequacy framework as the AP math analysis.

The Critics Poll analysis has its own limits. Sources name a high school for only 46 of 85 musicians, and biographies may mention arts magnets more readily than ordinary schools. School measures are from 2021–22, not from when each musician attended, so they describe what those schools are today. The generational comparison is descriptive and rests on small numbers.

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Appendix A. High schools of prominent U.S.-raised jazz musicians

The suburban public high schools that produced well-known working jazz musicians in this anecdotal list sit in districts funded at 1.1 to 1.5 times their labor-market adequacy, and enroll a fraction of their region's low-income share. The urban pipelines run mostly through audition-based arts magnets. This is an illustrative list built from published biographies, not a sample. Affluence measures are current (NECM 2009–2024 averages; CCD 2021–22) and may differ from conditions when each musician attended.

Table A1. Suburban and small-city public schools

School (district)	Musicians	District adequacy vs. LM	Low-income %, school / LM
Hall High School, West Hartford, CT	Brad Mehldau (piano), Joel Frahm (tenor sax), Pat Zimmerli (sax, composer); Mehldau and Frahm were classmates in the jazz band	1.11	20 / 37
Greenwich, CT (Greenwich Public Schools)	Kevin Hays (piano, raised in Greenwich); Gary Versace (piano, organ, from Cos Cob in Greenwich)	1.49	20 / 33 (Greenwich HS)
Palos Verdes Estates, CA (Palos Verdes Peninsula USD)	Mark Turner (tenor sax), raised in Palos Verdes Estates	1.49	7–9 / 65 (district high schools)
Brookline High School, Brookline, MA	Grace Kelly (alto sax, vocals)	1.51	15 / 43*
Lexington High School, Lexington, MA	Steven Feifke (piano, big-band arranger), class of 2009	1.30	6 / 28*
Berkeley High School, Berkeley, CA	Joshua Redman (tenor sax), Benny Green (piano), Craig Handy (sax), Peter Apfelbaum (sax, composer), Steven Bernstein (trumpet), Ambrose Akinmusire (trumpet), Elena Pinderhughes (flute, vocals)	1.39	23 / 39
Roosevelt High School, Seattle, WA	Sara Gazarek (vocals)	1.04	15 / 38

Note: *Massachusetts: direct certification. The high schools of Hays, Versace and Turner are not named in the biographical sources consulted; district-level measures are shown.

Berkeley High is the most prolific public pipeline here and also the most mixed. It is a single comprehensive high school for a racially diverse city, but its district is funded at 1.39 times its labor market and the school enrolls a lower low-income share than the region.

Table A2. Private and arts-magnet schools, for contrast

School (district)	Musicians	District adequacy vs. LM	Low-income %, school / LM
Woodside Priory School, Portola Valley, CA (private)	Taylor Eigsti (piano), raised in Menlo Park	—	—
High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, Houston, TX (Houston ISD)	Jason Moran, Robert Glasper, Helen Sung (piano); Eric Harland, Kendrick Scott, Chris Dave, Jamire Williams (drums); Walter Smith III (tenor sax); Mike Moreno (guitar)	0.75	16 / 60
Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School, New York, NY	Bill Charlap (piano), Eddie Gómez (bass), Marcus Miller (bass), Billy Cobham and Omar Hakim (drums), Charnett Moffett (bass), Don Byron (clarinet), Kenny Washington (drums)	NYC not in NECM	—

Houston's HSPVA mirrors the arts-magnet finding in Section 5.7. It sits in a district funded at 0.75 times its labor market, with child poverty 11 points above it, yet enrolls 16 percent low-income students against 60 percent across Houston-area high schools.

Sources for Appendix A: Wikipedia biographies of Brad Mehldau, Kevin Hays, Mark Turner, Grace Kelly and Taylor Eigsti; All About Jazz (Trefzger, "Joel Frahm's musical reunion"); Eastman School of Music faculty biography (Gary Versace); *Boston Globe* (January 24, 2014, Steven Feifke); Berkeley High School Jazz alumni page (bhsjazz.org); NPR *A Blog Supreme* (October 21, 2010, Houston HSPVA alumni); Wikipedia list of Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School alumni; Wikipedia, Roosevelt High School (Seattle).

Appendix B. High schools of U.S.-raised DownBeat Critics Poll winners under 65

Among winners born since 1980 whose high school is named in published sources, three in four came through public arts magnets, and most of those schools enroll far fewer low-income students than their regions. The list covers Rising Star category winners 2016–2022, headline Rising Star winners 2023–2026, and main-poll category winners 2016–2022, limited to musicians born in 1961 or later and raised mainly in the United States. High schools are recorded only when a source names one; for five musicians identified only by hometown, the measures describe that town's public high school. Low-income shares are 2021–22 CCD; district adequacy is the NECM 2009–2024 average relative to the labor market. Districts offering universal free meals (Philadelphia, Kansas City) are shown as —. "~" marks birth years not given in the sources consulted. RS = Rising Star.

Table B1. Critics Poll winners' high schools

Musician	Born	Poll recognition	Raised	High school (as named in sources)	Type	Low-income %, school / LM	District adequacy vs. LM
Ralph Peterson Jr.	1962	RS 2020	Pleasantville NJ	Pleasantville High School	Traditional public	79 / 52	0.87
Jeff Ballard	~1963	RS 2017	not stated	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Ben Street	1965	RS 2020	Maine	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Roberta Piket	1965	RS 2018	Queens NY	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Terri Lyne Carrington	1965	main artist	Medford MA	Medford High School	Traditional public	44 / 29	0.86
Regina Carter	1966	main violin	Detroit MI	Cass Technical High School	Selective public	62 / 55	0.47
Eric Revis	1967	RS 2017	Los Angeles CA	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Kurt Elling	1967	main vocal	Rockford IL	Rockford Lutheran High School	Private	—	—
Nicole Mitchell	1967	RS 2018; main flute	Anaheim CA	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Wycliffe Gordon	1967	main trombone	Augusta GA	Butler High School	Traditional public	98 / 64	0.66
Willie Jones III	1968	RS 2022	Los Angeles CA	not stated	Unknown	—	—
James Carter	1969	main baritone	Detroit MI	not stated (youth ensemble; Blue Lake camp)	Unknown	—	—
Brian Blade	1970	main drums	Shreveport LA	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Gregory Porter	1971	main vocal	Bakersfield CA	Highland High School	Traditional public	79 / 74	0.82
Joey DeFrancesco	1971	main organ	Springfield PA	Philadelphia HS for Creative and Performing Arts	Arts magnet	—	0.40
Rudresh Mahanthappa	1971	main alto	Boulder CO	Fairview High School	Traditional public	14 / 44	1.33

Musician	Born	Poll recognition	Raised	High school (as named in sources)	Type	Low-income %, school / LM	District adequacy vs. LM
Vijay Iyer	1971	main	Fairport NY	not stated	Unknown (town only)	22 / 47	1.27
Christian McBride	1972	RS 2017; main bass	Philadelphia PA	Philadelphia HS for Creative and Performing Arts	Arts magnet	—	0.40
Mimi Jones	1972	RS 2018	Bronx NY	LaGuardia High School	Arts magnet	34 / 76	—
Ches Smith	~1973	RS 2021	Sacramento CA	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Stefon Harris	1973	RS 2021; main vibes	Albany NY	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Miles Okazaki	1974	RS 2019	Port Townsend WA	not stated	Unknown (town only)	49 / 58	1.00
Dave Rempis	1975	RS 2017	Wellesley MA	not stated	Unknown (town only)	8 / 42	1.67
Jimmy Greene	1975	RS 2018	Hartford area CT	Bloomfield High School	Traditional public	58 / 37	0.78
Matana Roberts	1975	RS 2017/2018	Chicago IL	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Orrin Evans	1975	RS 2018	Philadelphia PA	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Sunny Jain	1975	RS 2017	Rochester NY	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Taylor Ho Bynum	1975	RS 2017	Boston MA	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Wayne Escoffery	1975	RS 2021	New Haven CT	ACES Educational Center for the Arts	Arts magnet	—	—
Johnathan Blake	1976	RS 2018/2022	Philadelphia PA	George Washington High School	Traditional public	—	0.40
Amir ElSaffar	1977	RS 2018	Chicago IL	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Tomas Fujiwara	~1977	RS 2021	Cambridge MA	Cambridge Rindge and Latin School	Traditional public	38 / 29	1.19
Tomeka Reid	1977	RS 2018; main misc.	Silver Spring MD area	Duke Ellington School of the Arts (briefly)	Arts magnet	22 / 41	0.79
Brian Landrus	1978	RS 2021	Reno NV	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Dayna Stephens	1978	RS 2019	SF Bay Area CA	Berkeley High School	Traditional public	23 / 39	1.39
Jen Shyu	1978	RS 2017	Peoria IL	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Marshall Gilkes	1978	RS 2017	military family (several states)	Interlochen Arts Academy	Private	—	—
Robert Glasper	1978	main keyboard	Houston TX	Elkins HS; HSPVA	Arts magnet	16 / 60	0.75
Sara Caswell	1978	RS 2017	Bloomington IN	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Logan Richardson	1980	RS 2022	Kansas City MO	Paseo Academy of Fine and Performing Arts	Arts magnet	—	0.56
Mary Halvorson	1980	RS 2017; main guitar	Brookline MA	not stated	Unknown (town only)	15 / 42	1.51
Tyshawn Sorey	1980	RS 2018	Newark NJ	Newark Arts High School	Arts magnet	70 / 33	0.60
Dezron Douglas	~1981	RS 2019	Hartford CT	not stated	Unknown	—	—

Musician	Born	Poll recognition	Raised	High school (as named in sources)	Type	Low-income %, school / LM	District adequacy vs. LM
Kamasi Washington	1981	RS 2016/2019; main album	Los Angeles CA	Alexander Hamilton HS Academy of Music	Arts magnet	74 / 65	0.98
Leslie Odom Jr.	1981	RS 2020	Philadelphia PA	Philadelphia HS for Creative and Performing Arts	Arts magnet	—	0.40
Thomas Morgan	1981	RS 2018	Hayward CA	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Zaccai Curtis	1981	RS 2020	Hartford area CT	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Ambrose Akinmusire	1982	main trumpet	Oakland CA	Berkeley High School	Traditional public	23 / 39	1.39
Lakecia Benjamin	~1982	RS 2020	Washington Heights NY	LaGuardia High School	Arts magnet	34 / 76	—
Michael Dease	1982	main trombone	Augusta GA	Davidson Fine Arts Magnet High School	Arts magnet	26 / 64	0.66
Nir Felder	1982	RS 2021	Westchester NY	John Jay High School	Traditional public	9 / 41	2.66
Ulysses Owens Jr.	1982	RS 2022	Jacksonville FL	Douglas Anderson School of the Arts	Arts magnet	19 / 39	0.85
Brandee Younger	1983	RS 2020	Hempstead NY	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Jaimie Branch	1983	RS 2020	Huntington NY / Chicago	not stated	Unknown	—	—
James Brandon Lewis	~1983	RS 2020/2024; main	Buffalo NY	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Luques Curtis	1983	RS 2016	Windsor CT	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts	Arts magnet	—	—
Makaya McCraven	1983	RS 2020	western Massachusetts	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Becca Stevens	1984	RS 2017	Winston-Salem NC	Peddie School; UNC School of the Arts HS	Arts magnet	—	—
Ben Williams	1984	RS 2022	Washington DC	Duke Ellington School of the Arts	Arts magnet	22 / 41	0.79
Esperanza Spalding	1984	RS 2017	Portland OR	Northwest Academy (scholarship)	Private	—	—
Gerald Clayton	1984	RS 2021	Los Angeles CA	Los Angeles County HS for the Arts	Arts magnet	—	—
Thundercat	1984	RS 2017	Compton / Los Angeles CA	Locke High School	Traditional public	93 / 74	—
Aaron Diehl	1985	RS 2020	Columbus OH	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Aaron Weinstein	1985	RS 2019	Winnetka IL	New Trier High School	Traditional public	—	1.86
Kate Gentile	1985	RS 2022	Buffalo NY	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Theo Croker	1985	RS 2022	Leesburg FL	Douglas Anderson School of the Arts	Arts magnet	19 / 39	0.85
Jon Batiste	1986	main artist	Kenner LA	St. Augustine HS; New Orleans Center for Creative Arts	Arts magnet	—	—
Noah Preminger	1986	RS 2017/2022	Canton CT	not stated	Unknown (town only)	13 / 37	1.22

Musician	Born	Poll recognition	Raised	High school (as named in sources)	Type	Low-income %, school / LM	District adequacy vs. LM
Roxy Coss	1986	RS 2022	Seattle WA	Garfield High School	Traditional public	40 / 38	1.04
Sullivan Fortner	1986	RS 2019/2020	New Orleans LA	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Cory Henry	1987	RS 2021	Brooklyn NY	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Jamison Ross	1987	RS 2018	Jacksonville FL	Douglas Anderson School of the Arts	Arts magnet	19 / 39	0.85
Julian Lage	1987	RS 2018	Santa Rosa CA	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Cecile McLorin Salvant	1989	main vocal	Miami FL	not stated	Unknown	—	—
Kris Bowers	1989	RS 2017	Los Angeles CA	Los Angeles County HS for the Arts	Arts magnet	—	—
Emmet Cohen	1990	RS 2022	Montclair NJ	Montclair High School	Traditional public	13 / 33	1.02
Jazzmeia Horn	1991	RS 2018	Dallas TX	Booker T. Washington HSPVA	Arts magnet	27 / 54	0.66
Natalie Cressman	~1991	RS 2019	San Francisco CA	Ruth Asawa School of the Arts	Arts magnet	19 / 34	0.82
Adam O'Farrill	1994	RS 2019/2021/2026	Brooklyn NY	LaGuardia High School (inferred)	Arts magnet	34 / 76	—
Veronica Swift	1994	RS 2020	Charlottesville VA	not stated	Unknown	—	—
James Francies	1995	RS 2022	Houston TX	High School for the Performing and Visual Arts	Arts magnet	16 / 60	0.75
Joel Ross	1995	RS 2019; main vibes	Chicago IL	Chicago High School for the Arts	Arts magnet	54 / 55	0.64
Immanuel Wilkins	1997	RS 2021/2022/2023	Upper Darby PA	not stated (Clef Club youth program)	Unknown	—	—
Sasha Berliner	1998	RS 2020	SF Bay Area CA	not stated (SFJAZZ HS All-Stars)	Unknown	—	—
Samara Joy	1999	RS 2023	Bronx NY	Fordham High School for the Arts	Arts magnet	84 / 76	—

Sources for Appendix B: DownBeat Critics Poll announcements on downbeat.com; Wikipedia biographies; *Point of Departure* interviews (Adam O'Farrill, Tomas Fujiwara); Arbus (Ulysses Owens Jr.).