2026-2027 SPOTLIGHT AWARDS

ADJUDICATOR HANDBOOK

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ABOUT THE SPOTLIGHT AWARDS PROGRAM

The Spotlight Awards program is an arts education initiative of the Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC) which celebrates, supports, and grows the artistry and community within high school theatre programs in Tennessee while developing confidence, creativity, empathy, and collaboration among schools. The Spotlight Awards strives to embody a spirit of camaraderie, inclusion, celebration for the arts, and a growth mindset.

Program Goals

- To strengthen our community by instilling values of artistic excellence, creativity, a growth mindset, and collaboration in our participants
- To provide high quality, enriching educational experiences in dance, theatre, and music for students, directors, and school arts programs
- To celebrate, support, grow, and advocate for high school theatre education by recognizing excellence in area high school theatre productions
- To grow and develop artists, theatre audiences, and arts advocates in Tennessee by building a rich and collaborative high school theatre community
- To engage community members, schools, and families in an inclusive celebration of theatre

Thank you to our sponsors Nissan North America – Official Education Partner, Tennessee Arts Commission, Metro Arts Nashville, Vanderbilt University, and Baker Tilly.

Special thanks to our Founding Sponsor, Lipscomb University's College of Entertainment and the Arts.

National High School Musical Theatre Awards – The Jimmy Awards

The Spotlight Awards program is one of over 65 regional awards program affiliated with The National High School Musical Theatre Awards® (the Jimmy Awards®), presented by the Broadway League Foundation. The Jimmy Awards® are a national celebration of outstanding student achievement, recognizing individual artistry in vocal, dance, and acting performance and elevating the importance of theatre arts education in schools. For more information on the Jimmy Awards, visit www.jimmyawards.com.

The depth, scope, and education-centric mission of the Jimmy Awards® coupled with its extensive television and media exposure has made participating in the program an aspiration for a growing number of high schools. Based on feedback from participating theatres, school administrators are now directing both human and financial resources to improve the quality of theatre arts education in their districts. This renewed enthusiasm for the performing arts in schools is already helping to invigorate local theatres and the communities they serve.

SPOTLIGHT AWARDS PROGRAM VALUES

Community

We know that the lure of competition may be hard to ignore, but the Spotlight Awards is designed to be ***celebratory rather than competitive*** *in nature, and the awards are only a fraction of the program. We are an Awards Ceremony 1 day of the year,* ***but we are an Education and Community program every day of the year*** *focused on goals such as encouraging collaboration and creativity, strengthening our community, championing inclusion, celebrating and supporting arts education and achievements, and developing a growth mindset.*

The Spotlight community is a loving and safe place to learn about yourself and the arts industry we all love. We invite you to attend workshops, interact with us digitally, and find ways to engage with our community – it was created for you.

Respect and Belonging

We believe every young artist has value and potential, and every participating student and educator should ***contribute to an environment that is empowering, educational, exciting, and welcoming*** *to all. All participants should be treated with dignity and respect, and in turn should treat others with dignity and respect. The Spotlight Awards seeks to build community amongst our region's high school theatre programs, all of which are* ***worthy of celebration*** *for the value they bring to our youth and our communities.*

Growth

Participating schools challenge themselves to ***continually grow and create the best work*** *in their unique circumstances.* ***So enjoy the journey, celebrate your achievements and the achievements of others, and find ways to continually learn and grow along the way.*** *Work hard, push yourself, challenge yourself, take a step out of your comfort zone - it's in these moments that growth happens.*

Inclusion

To enrich the artistic experience, we strive to make room on the stage, around the production table and behind the scenes to students and community members. ***Our wish for each of our participants is that they see the light in this world, in themselves, and in others.*** *Everyone is unique and special, and it's those unique qualities in each of us that make the world so beautiful. Be the best possible version of yourself, and choose to find the good in everyone around you and to celebrate with them.*

Creative Excellence

The Spotlight Awards readily recognizes that artistic excellence provides new insights into the world around us, leading us to question and appreciate what we have never experienced. Excellence in the arts occurs when ***an experience affects and changes us in novel ways, providing both fresh and relevant perspectives****. We celebrate the creativity and outstanding work happening in our high school arts programs.*

Photo by Caitlin McNaney for MA2LA Photography.

SCHOOL PARTICIPATION TRACK DETAILS

Community Track – School and Individuals (FREE)
The Spotlight Awards strives to encourage and support all school arts programs. We acknowledge that not all schools produce a musical or have a theatre program, and we want to support and provide educational experiences for any student who loves the arts regardless of their school participation. Community participation is open to all Tennessee schools and individual students, regardless of distance from TPAC.

Show Review Track – School Participation ($150 per show)
Two artists attend a performance and provide written feedback (no scores or awards presentation) to help schools continue to grow and improve their artistic work. Schools participating in the Show Review track can request a review for any show (play, musical, one-acts) in their season. Show Review is a great option for Middle and High Schools with new teachers, new theater programs, plays and shows not included in the Qualifying Show list, and anyone interested in a low-stress, no-risk option to participate.

Adjudication Track – School Participation ($350)
Schools that register for Adjudication will have 3 artists adjudicate their musical, receive written feedback for their performance, and are eligible for award nominations at the Spotlight Awards Ceremony.

<u>All Participation tracks include:</u>

- Invitations to all master classes, community events and invited dress rehearsals throughout the year
- Free headshot opportunity for students
- Eligibility for students to apply for other opportunities and scholarships, such as Rising Star Scholarships, Arts Leadership Scholarships, Design Symposium and more.

Dance Master Class with & Juliet cast members, including Josh Jordan – Spotlight Alumni

ADJUDICATION ROLES

Spotlight adjudication is considered a volunteer position. However, adjudicators may submit an invoice for an honorarium after attending a performance.

Experience Required
Spotlight Awards Adjudicators will have:

- Demonstrated experience in or knowledge of musical theatre;
- And/or a degree in a relevant field (music, theatre, dance, etc.);
- And/or extensive work experience in one of those disciplines on a professional or academic basis;
- And/or are professional artists or educators with knowledge of the American musical theatre canon.

The Adjudicator Role

- Thoughtful and Supportive: Your role is to encourage the students and directors by providing your expertise and guiding them toward constructive self-evaluation through feedback and helpful observations.
- Positive and Kind: You are the face of the Spotlight Awards and the Tennessee Performing Arts Center. Everything you say and do should reflect our program goals to better the community and celebrate arts education.

Adjudication Advocates
To ensure consistency across the process, at least one Adjudication Advocate will attend each school's performance. Adjudication Advocates are a subset of program staff and adjudicators who help ensure consistency across the scoring and will be part of the nominee selection process as an advocate for each performance they attend. In some cases, one of the assigned adjudicators may also be an Advocate; in other cases, a fourth adjudicator or a member of program staff will attend as the Adjudication Advocate. Regardless, only three sets of adjudicator scores will be used for any school.

Show Review Track
Schools registered for the Show Review Track will have 2 artists review their performance. These reviewers will provide written feedback only, no scores. Feedback may be requested for specific areas as well.

Photo by MA2LA Photography.

ADJUDICATION OVERVIEW

Adjudicators will evaluate each school independently based on how well a school is meeting or exceeding their own potential with their unique resources and challenges, regardless of budget or size of the production. Different teams of adjudicators attend each production, however, to ensure consistency at least one Adjudication Advocate will attend each school's performance. Adjudicators are asked to provide valuable feedback, **not in comparison**, but rather in the hopes of celebrating the achievements of each production and offering insights for strengthening future shows.

Community Over Competition

The Spotlight Awards is designed to be celebratory rather than competitive in nature. Participating schools are not directly competing against each other but rather challenging themselves to continually grow and create the best possible work they can in their unique circumstances regardless of budget or size of the production. The Spotlight Awards strives to embody a spirit of camaraderie, inclusion, celebration for the arts, and a growth mindset.

Opening Night Adjudication

Every effort is made to send all adjudicators to the same performance – Opening Night. This guideline is set for several reasons –

1. Nothing beats the energy of Opening Night, and adjudicator scores reflect this positively.
2. Sending all adjudicators to the same show allows scoring to be based on the same experience instead of varying based on incidents on different nights.
3. Student health and voices are still at their best at Opening. By the end of a show run, student voices start to strain affecting their scores. Additionally, understudies may be performing by the end of a run due to vocal strain or illness, which may affect scoring and nomination eligibility.

During High-Volume show weekends in March and April, it is likely that several schools will have a mix of attendance dates. In this situation, attendance dates and which schools have this variation will be based solely on adjudicator availability.

Conflict of Interest

Adjudicators and/or School Directors are required to alert the Spotlight Awards administrators immediately if there is a conflict of interest with a participating school. Adjudicators having a relationship, either professional or personal, with a particular school are not assigned to evaluate that school's production. Additionally, Adjudicators should identify any personal biases (positive or negative) towards a specific show title or school community and include these as a conflict for scheduling.

If an Adjudicator and/or Director are seen speaking to each other after the performance, this will be viewed as indicator of a conflict of interest, and the adjudication will be null. Contact the Spotlight office immediately if this happens so another adjudicator can be sent to a different performance.

Show Review Track Overview

Artist attendance at a Show Review is not as strict with anonymity or opening night requirements. Adjudicators will still check in using the name Jimmy Ward and pick up a playbill with their tickets. However, feedback for these shows is written only (no scores) and may be focused on specific director requests. All policies regarding professionalism and respect, confidentiality of feedback and conflicts of interest still apply for Show Reviews.

Photo by MA2LA Photography.

ADJUDICATION SCHEDULING AND PROCEDURES

Application and Writing Samples
Adjudicator Applications are open July-January of any season. New adjudicators will provide writing samples within the application process to demonstrate positive, specific, constructive feedback.

Training
Training for Spotlight Awards adjudicators is mandatory once a year. At least 2 training options are provided each year, and each includes extensive discussions and practice with rubrics, scoring, and written feedback.

Letter of Agreement
Participating Adjudicators are required to submit a signed Letter of Agreement after training is completed.

Adjudication Documents – W-9, Ballot, and Invoice

- Current W-9 – Submitted SECURELY using the provided request link by October 5 for fall shows, or February 1 for spring shows. Secure upload link here - bit.ly/TPAC-AP Do not email W-9 information.
- Ballots are submitted online within THREE DAYS of seeing the performance.
- Invoices – Adjudicator honorariums are paid twice a year – in January and May. To be paid for fall adjudication in January, invoices are due by January 6. All invoices must be submitted by April 30, 2027, to be paid for the current year's adjudication. Details on how to submit your invoices can be found on page 9.

Performance Scheduling
Adjudication happens on each school's Opening Night, meaning most adjudication will happen on Thursday and Friday nights. In special cases, we may ask for last-minute adjudication on other show dates.

- Adjudicators are encouraged to attend at least 2 performances during a school year, but may attend more as scheduling allows. Attending a performance includes time to review Performance Detail information prior to the show, the performance itself, and time to submit your ballot.
- Adjudicators are expected to arrive at least 10 minutes prior to a performance and to stay for the entire performance. However, they are not required to stay afterwards for any presentations on stage – adjudicators may leave during curtain call.
- Adjudicators are intentionally assigned to provide a unique set of experience and expertise for each show. Adjudicators will not be scheduled as a regular team.

Scheduling Your Attendance
Please carefully consider your reasons for choosing each show before signing up. If you are highly familiar with a show, let go of past productions and judge without making comparisons. Conversely, if you are completely new to a show, you are **expected** to conduct background research before submitting your final ballot or feedback. Please review alternative versions to ensure you do not mistakenly score unoriginal choices or direct copies as original work.

Tickets at Will Call
Two weeks before your adjudication date, Spotlight Administration will reach to confirm if adjudicators would like 1 or 2 tickets for the shows they are judging. Seating on aisles or towards the rear of the theatre is requested. Tickets will be listed under the name Jimmy Ward and separated into groupings of 2. Each set of 2 tickets should have at least one **printed playbill** included with it for adjudicators to pick up.

Production Detail Form and Information Email
The week of adjudication, Spotlight Administration will send an Information Email with details about the performance. This will include general information such as directions to the theater, ticketing notes, run time estimates, etc., as well as ballot reminders and the link. Additionally, eligibility information and Qualifying Roles will be listed, and attached to the email you will find the Production Detail Form filled out by the director with details on all elements of the performance.

ADJUDICATION – SHOW TIME

Performance Tickets and Playbills
Tickets will be listed under the name Jimmy Ward and separated into groupings of 2. Seating on aisles or towards the rear of the theatre is requested. Each set of 2 tickets should have at least one **printed playbill** included with it for adjudicators to pick up. If you are not able to get a playbill for any reason, let Spotlight Administration know immediately so they can provide one digitally. *Please do not collect all tickets and playbills. Pick up only your requested ticket(s) leaving the rest for others.*

Headshots Requested
Although we do not require headshots to be included in show programs due to costs, schools are strongly encouraged to include them either in the program or in the lobby. Adjudicators are asked to do their best identifying students with or without headshots and direct any questions to Spotlight Administration.

Anonymity
The Spotlight Awards strongly recommend schools allow the adjudicators to attend performances anonymously, so they can fairly evaluate the production without lobbying from cast members' families and friends or other school representatives. Adjudicators should not receive preferential seating, treatment or gifts of any kind. Schools may be disqualified for providing special treatment.

Expectations: Arrival – Intermission – Exit

- Adjudicators should plan to be in the theatre lobby at least 10 minutes prior to the show's start time.
- Use any extra time to find your seat and peruse the playbill in preparation.
- Do a mindfulness check in with yourself before the show starts, allowing yourself to let go of personal emotions or biases you may be unknowingly holding on to.
- Consider doing a "brain dump" of notes for yourself at Intermission and after the show to help yourself remember key thoughts when filling out the ballot the following day.
- At the end of the performance, you may exit the performance space once the bows begin. If you wish, you may choose to stay for curtain speeches, talkbacks, or meet-and-greets after the show, but you are not required to do so, and these elements should not impact your feedback or scoring.

Confidentiality
Adjudicator feedback is submitted through a secure online form. Please refrain from discussing the production (either positively or negatively) during the performance, at intermission or directly afterwards. Always assume that parents, grandparents, school faculty, students, etc. are listening. **Adjudicators should follow the 150-Yard Rule - do not comment on or mention any of your thoughts on a production until you are at least 150 yards away from the doors of the school.** Adjudicators are not allowed to discuss the results, evaluations, scores, or feedback with anyone other than Spotlight Awards administrators in any format. This includes, but is not limited to, faculty, staff and students from a participating high school, other adjudicators, colleagues, social media networks, etc.

Adjudicator Professionalism and Etiquette
Just like live theatre, there will undoubtedly be times when adjudication does not go as expected. Please remember your role in the school - Remain calm, positive and kind. You and your guests are always representing TPAC and the Spotlight Awards program while visiting a school. Engage with school staff, volunteers, students, parents and fellow audience members with a positive and respectful attitude. Report any needed information to Spotlight Administration afterwards while maintaining a positive representation of yourself and our program.

Questions for the Director
After the show closes, adjudicators may have questions about student roles/names, etc. Please send any questions for the director to Spotlight Administration as soon as possible, so we can get your responses quickly as well.

BALLOT SUBMISSION AND HONORARIUM INVOICE REQUEST PROCESS

Spotlight adjudication is considered a volunteer position. However, adjudicators may submit an invoice for an honorarium of $50 per show* after attending a performance. Payment will be made after **both ballot and invoice have been submitted**. **Schools over 60 miles from TPAC will pay an honorarium of $75.*

W-9 Secure Upload
In order to process your payment, TPAC will need your current W-9 information. Do not email W-9 information. Once it is filled out, please submit by October 5 for fall shows or February 1 for spring shows, using the secure upload link here - bit.ly/TPAC-AP

Ballot Submission
Ballots are submitted online at **https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BALLOT27.** In general, adjudicators have THREE DAYS to turn in their ballots to the Spotlight administrators. However, if adjudicating multiple shows back-to-back, adjudicators should submit ballots BEFORE attending the next show.

Invoice Submission

Honorariums will be paid twice a year – in January and May.

- Please list all adjudications per semester on one invoice.
- Please submit your ballot before your invoice.
- Invoices should be emailed to education@tpac.org, and must include your name, address, name of the school/date you adjudicated, and the amount due.
- Honorariums for adjudication are $50 per performance for locations <60 miles distance from TPAC (505 Deaderick Street, Nashville). When travelling farther than 60 miles from TPAC, the honorarium will be $75.
- To be paid for fall adjudication in January, invoices are due by January 6. All invoices must be submitted by April 30, 2027, to be paid for the current year's adjudication.

Adjudication Invoice Template
Today's Date / Invoice Number
Payable to:
Full Name (as listed on your W-9)
Mailing Address
City, State Zip

Spotlight Adjudication – *(Semester/Year)*

Date Attended	*School Name*	*$50.00*
Date Attended	*School Name*	*$50.00*
Date Attended	*School Name*	*$50.00*

TOTAL DUE: $150.00

Questions: *Phone Number / Email Address*

TPAC Staff Members
Adjudicators that are on staff at TPAC have a slightly different process to receive payment. However, the invoice process above is the same. If this applies to you, please ask for the TPAC Staff Adjudicator Addendum.

Optional Donations
Spotlight adjudication is considered a volunteer position. If you prefer not to request an honorarium you have the option on your ballot to donate your time.

2026-27 SPOTLIGHT AWARDS

ADJUDICATOR HANDBOOK

AWARDS, BALLOT SUBMISSION, AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK

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AWARDS LISTING

Based on adjudicator feedback, panel selections and/or teacher nominations, schools and individuals will be nominated in specific categories to be recognized at the Spotlight Awards Ceremony. Details for each listed award category can be found on the following pages. Participation in the Spotlight Awards program does not guarantee nominations or awards.

School Production and Design Awards

- Outstanding Cast Vocals
- Outstanding Orchestra
- Outstanding Music Direction
- Outstanding Small Ensemble
- Outstanding Large Ensemble
- Outstanding Costume Design
- Outstanding Hair and Makeup Design
- Outstanding Lighting Design
- Outstanding Set Design
- Outstanding Sound Operation
- Outstanding Design Concept
- Outstanding Choreography
- Outstanding Community Engagement (Director Nominated)
- Outstanding Direction (Faculty Only)
- Outstanding Musical *

Student Performance Awards

- Outstanding Dancer
- Outstanding Vocalist
- Outstanding Ensemble Performer
- Outstanding Supporting Role Performer
- Outstanding Comedic Performer
- Outstanding Dramatic Performer
- Outstanding Solo Performance
- Outstanding Scene Partner

Student Design and Technical Awards (Director Nominated)

- Outstanding Technical Achievement
- Outstanding Stage Manager
- Outstanding Student Designer
- Outstanding Original Design Creation
- Founder's Award

Outstanding Lead Performer - Each participating school director may select 1 student for nomination in the Outstanding Lead Performer category. Directors may choose to waive their option to select and allow adjudicators to make the selection. All schools will have **at least 1 Lead Performer** nominee.

Applause Awards for Special Recognition

The Spotlight Awards is a non-competitive program and wishes to honor schools for their work to the highest degree. Because of this, there is the possibility that a school could receive an honor not listed. If a Spotlight adjudicator finds a particular element of the production was outstanding or worthy of honorable mention, an Applause Award could be awarded for other special elements.

Determining Nominees

To determine nominations and recipients of each award, the nominee selection panel considers a variety of factors, and looks at all eligible candidates with a fresh perspective by thoroughly reviewing the Adjudicator feedback, scoring, photos, and mandatory support material. The selection panel includes Adjudication Advocates, which combined will have viewed all performances and advocate for each school. Eligibility for awards is at the discretion of the Spotlight Awards administration, which reserves the right to amend rules, overrule adjudicators, or select additional nominees as necessary to maintain a fair process. All decisions of The Spotlight Awards administrators and nominee selection panel are final.

Award Eligibility

Adjudicators are provided with eligibility information for each school in the Show Information email the week of the performance. General eligibility notes are provided on the following pages.

ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES – SCHOOL PRODUCTION AND DESIGN AWARDS

Outstanding Cast Vocals, Outstanding Orchestra, Outstanding Music Direction, Outstanding Small Ensemble, Outstanding Large Ensemble, Outstanding Costume Design, Outstanding Hair and Makeup Design, Outstanding Lighting Design, Outstanding Set Design, Outstanding Sound Operation, Outstanding Design Concept, Outstanding Choreography, Outstanding Direction, and Outstanding Musical

- We encourage participating schools to use readily available school resources, faculty, and students.
    - Faculty is defined as any full-time or part-time staff member at the school who is paid by the school district on an annual basis.
    - One who is hired or volunteers to work on select productions or who is paid by the school in another manner, does not qualify as faculty.
- The use of a professional/guest/parent artist will disqualify the school from that specific category.
- School award scores are a combination of design/storytelling interpretation added to execution of the element and effectiveness of the design to the overall story and performance needs.
- School Awards (other than Direction) may be nominated for adult OR student work with the following stipulations:
    - Outstanding Direction is for adult faculty members only, no student nominations.
    - Putting students in leadership/design roles is encouraged when possible.
    - For positions run by faculty adults – In order to be eligible for adult-run School Award Categories, a **student is required to participate in some manner with the role** – shadowing, assisting, co-running, etc.
    - Most school awards are design focused – In most situations, if a faculty member or student created the DESIGN, the school is eligible for the category, even if there was additional help and guidance for the implementation.

Originality Over Replication

A direct copy of another's interpretation of a story is often not as powerful as an original approach, nor is it acceptable to use without proper credit. Every production should reflect the unique imagination of its designers, actors and directors who demonstrate creative use of resources and available talent. For instances that require replicating an element for an iconic dance scene, costume, set, etc. please ensure the appropriate credit is included in your playbill.

Spotlight Alumni Joseph Kent teaching a session on wig styling at the Spotlight Community Kickoff Celebration.

ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS – STUDENT PERFORMANCE AWARDS

Outstanding Vocalist, Outstanding Dancer, Outstanding Ensemble Performer, Outstanding Supporting Role Performer, Outstanding Comedic Performer, Outstanding Dramatic Performer, Outstanding Solo Performance, Outstanding Scene Partner

- Eligible performers must be registered in grades 9-12. Roles performed by a professional/guest performer, faculty members and K-8 students are not eligible for award nominations, but do not affect the overall eligibility for the musical.
- Schools are permitted to present a co-production, share performers with another school, or cast homeschool students. However, students may only be nominated for their role in one musical.
- If a school has multiple casts performing the musical, the school must select one cast to be adjudicated and eligible for awards. The adjudicated cast should be clearly identified and labeled on all playbills and production notes.

Individual Nomination for Awards
The Individual Student Awards will have 10-12 nominees and 2 award winners. While adjudicators will attempt to maintain an equal mix of genders in their nominations, it is not a required limitation to their selections.

Adjudication Role Classification Notes

- **Lead Roles** include at least one solo song, appearances in more than one scene with spoken dialogue, and appear in both or all acts.
    - Not all Spotlight classified "Lead Roles" are eligible for Jimmy Awards Lead Performer classification. Roles included on the Jimmy Awards list of Qualifying Roles will be scored in the Outstanding Lead Performer category.
- **Supporting Roles** are scripted, named characters with either spoken or sung dialogue which help drive the action of the play forward.
    - Some Spotlight classified "Supporting Roles" may also be classified as Jimmy Awards Lead Performers and therefore nominated for Outstanding Lead Performer as well. For example, the show *The Addams Family* has 10 Jimmy Awards Qualifying Roles. While the role of Pugsley is considered a Qualifying Role and would be scored in the Lead Performer category, this role is also often considered a Supporting Role within the story. Therefore, a performer in this role could be nominated in both a Supporting category and a Lead Performer category, as the classifications between Spotlight and Jimmy Awards differ.
- **Ensemble Roles** are named or unnamed characters with less than 5 lines of spoken or sung dialogue.
    - **For unnamed roles or named roles that are not identified within the text of the show – directors should provide additional information and names for easy identification.**
    - Some supporting roles may also be considered in the Ensemble Performer category if their role is smaller than other supporting roles or if a show doesn't have a large ensemble.

In all cases, the role classification will be based on the show and role and determined on a case-by-case basis by adjudicator nominations.

ELIGIBILITY PER CATEGORY – STUDENT PERFORMANCE AWARDS

Outstanding Ensemble Performer, Outstanding Supporting Role Performer, Outstanding Comedic Performer, and Outstanding Dramatic Performer categories - Performer created authentic, unique, believable and consistent characters while maintaining a strong sense of their role, character relationships and understanding of the overall concept and themes. For more detailed information, look at the rubrics for each award.

Outstanding Vocalist (Lead or Supporting Role)
Vocalists should exhibit outstanding vocal interpretation as well as accuracy and advanced performance execution.

- This category is based on vocals for the entire show, for Lead or Supporting roles that have multiple vocal moments throughout. For more detailed information, look at the rubrics for each award.

Outstanding Solo Performance - Any Role (Lead, Supporting, or Ensemble)

- Focused on **an individual moment** - This category is focused on an individual solo performance that made a meaningful impact on the audience. It may be a full solo song, or a small solo within a song that stood out to judges. For more detailed information, look at the rubrics for each award.

Outstanding Dancer - Any Role (Lead, Supporting, or Ensemble)
Outstanding Dancers should be precise and energetic, while sharing the character intentions and themes of the show. For more detailed information, look at the rubrics for each award.

Outstanding Scene Partner - Any Role (Lead, Supporting, or Ensemble)
This award is specifically for work as an acting partner. The performer created authentic, unique, believable and consistent characters while maintaining strong character relationships through listening and reacting in the moment and understanding of the overall concept and themes of the show. For more detailed information, look at the rubrics for each award.

Photo by MA2LA Photography.

OUTSTANDING LEAD PERFORMER DEFINED

The selection process funnels hundreds of initial candidates down to a pair of final winners through five distinct, increasingly rigorous stages:

Director and Adjudicator Nominations for Every School
The widest tier of the selection pool, where directors and adjudicators nominate outstanding lead performers in Qualifying Roles across all participating regional schools.

Outstanding Lead Performer **NOMINEE**
The pool is narrowed significantly as judges review initial ballots and establish the official shortlist of nominees.

- ✓ The full list of Lead Nominees will include at least 1 student (no more than 4) from each participating school.
- ✓ All Nominees are invited to participate in the Lead Performer Intensive weekend and to perform in the Closing Number at the Spotlight Awards Ceremony.
    - *Nominees that wish to be considered for Semifinalist, Finalist and Award Recipient categories must submit an audition video by April 27 for review. Students will be notified if they are a semifinalist during the Intensive weekend and should prepare for a possible live audition.*
    - *Nominees that do not wish to be considered for further opportunities can opt to attend the Intensive with the Non-Audition path (no video submission) and perform in the Closing Number at the Ceremony.*

Outstanding Lead Performer **SEMIFINALIST**

Nominees undergo further evaluation based on the audition video submission.

- ✓ **Nominees that wish to be considered for Semifinalist, Finalist and Award Recipient categories must submit an audition video by April 27 for review.** A large panel of professional artists will review audition videos. Semifinalists will be selected based on the submitted audition videos using the provided rubric.
- ✓ During the Intensive Weekend (May 2-3), Semifinalists will be announced at the end of the first day (May 2). They will perform in a live audition for TPAC Staff and Spotlight Administrators during the second day (May 3).

Outstanding Lead Performer **FINALIST**
8 Finalists will be selected from a combination of School Adjudication Feedback, Video Audition Feedback, Live Auditions and Lead Intensive participation.

- ✓ Finalists will be selected from the live Semifinalist auditions during the Intensive weekend, using the provided rubrics. Students will be notified by Monday, May 4 if they are a Finalist.
- ✓ Finalists will perform a solo from their school's nominated role at the Spotlight Awards Ceremony.

Outstanding Lead Performer **Award Recipients** – aka Jimmy Awards Nominee

- ✓ The Award Recipients will be announced at the end of the Spotlight Awards Ceremony. Two students are selected after Semifinalist auditions as the Award Recipients (no judging happens during the ceremony) but not announced until the end of the Awards Ceremony. These 2 students will continue to New York as Jimmy Awards Nominees the following month.

BALLOT SUBMISSION OVERVIEW

Each adjudicator is asked to focus their feedback in a positive way, with the goal of encouraging and growing the arts in our community in mind. Adjudicator feedback is meant to serve as an educational tool, for teachers and students to use these insights to make their next show even stronger. Please be **constructive, specific, and objective** with your feedback.

Adjudicator Ballots

The ballot includes two parts, a scoring sheet and written feedback. The scoring sheet is an internal form. We do not share scores with schools or nominees, just as the Tony Awards do not share the numbers of votes each nominee gets. Written feedback will be shared with schools and should be provided with that in mind. It is up to the discretion of the director to share any or all feedback with their students. Adjudication feedback is at the discretion of the Spotlight Awards administration, which reserves the right to amend rules as necessary to maintain a fair process.

Ballot Submission

Ballots are submitted online at **https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BALLOT27.** Adjudicators have THREE DAYS to turn in their ballots to the Spotlight administrators. **Adjudicators should write a minimum of 3-4 complete sentences of feedback for each question.**

Non-competitive process

Adjudicators should not be comparing school productions to each other. Due to scheduling and availability, adjudicators could be assigned to evaluate the same show at different schools. Keep in mind that each school should be viewed and evaluated on its own production, not compared to any others. Your feedback, scoring and honors should always reflect the question, "What are they doing with what they've been given?"

Photo by Caitlin McNaney for MA2LA Photography.

Outstanding Work

Adjudicators are not required to nominate students in every individual category. That being said, there is something outstanding happening at every school. Whether a school has a budget of $500 or $50,000, or if a show has 75 students versus 15, students across the state are creating admirable theater with the best resources they have available. Your ballot should reflect that in your scoring, student nominations, and written feedback.

Addressing Budget and Resources

The Spotlight Awards is committed to ensuring that all participating schools are treated equitably, regardless of their financial resources or available facilities. We recognize that schools vary widely in terms of budgets, access to materials, and production capabilities. Judging and recognition are based on the creativity, dedication, and storytelling demonstrated in each performance—not on the size of a school's budget or the technical resources available. Our goal is to celebrate excellence in high school theatre in a way that is inclusive, fair, and accessible to all.

Maximizing Resources is as Valuable as Maximum Resources, and while a comparison of theaters participating in the program will unearth a wide variety of budgets, available equipment, performance spaces and other tangible measurements of resources, it need never impact the **ability to tell a compelling story**. It is our mission to support and celebrate each program to ensure a positive educational experience for all, and it is an evaluator's responsibility to keep this in mind when giving scores and feedback.

AWARDS RUBRIC OVERVIEW

In the theater, we tell stories.

The Spotlight Awards adjudicators review the storytelling abilities put to work in each production. We are looking for an authentic tale well told by the production team, ensemble, and individual performers. Judging and recognition are based on the creativity, dedication, and storytelling demonstrated in each performance, not on the size of a school's budget or the technical resources available. Our goal is to celebrate excellence in high school theatre in a way that is inclusive, fair, and accessible to all, focused on the ability to tell a compelling story.

- ✓ How well does the company understand the story they are telling? How clearly do they relate that story and its themes to the audience?
- ✓ How passionately do the actors embody their characters and express their journey through this story?
- ✓ How do the actors use the performance skills of musical theatre (singing, dancing, and acting) to enhance the story?
- ✓ How collaborative was the company in presenting a unified concept for the audience to engage with?
- ✓ How did they showcase the unique talents and resources of the school and cast to advance the story and concept they created?
- ✓ How creatively did the company transfer the story from page to the stage?
- ✓ How does the storytelling create a memorable experience, emotion and change in the audience?

Adjudicator Rubric Scoring - Each award category available for adjudication has a rubric with detailed descriptions of the scoring. An overarching look at the scoring guidelines is below.

DEVELOPING (1-4)	PROFICIENT (5-9)
• Presented the story practically, so that the events logically transpired but without impact to the characters. At times the effort to improve skills supersedes the story. • All technical elements served the basic requirements outlined in the script, but there is no evidence of collaboration with other areas to present a unified concept. • The musical selection was not appropriate, included harmful content or stereotypes, or did not showcase the school/cast talents and resources and produced few engaging moments.	• Created a layered story with clear, evolving characters through a practical approach with moments of creativity evident. • An attempt was made to present a unified concept with input from all technical and performance components. • The musical selection rarely showcased the school/cast's unique talents and resources, producing some interesting and engaging moments with some obvious missed opportunities.
SKILLED (10-15)	**ADVANCED (16-20)**
• Strong storytelling with solid, believable characters and a creative approach. • A clear vision of the concept for the production was carried out with some evidence of creative collaborations from technical and performance areas. • The musical selection was appropriate and showcased some of the unique talents of the school's performers and technicians, producing mostly strong elements of musical theater.	• Masterful storytelling with authentic, emotion-driven characters and a meaningful, memorable, and unique approach. • A clear, focused vision of the concept for the production was fully integrated with creative collaboration from each technical and performance area to ensure design consistency and advance nuanced themes. • The musical selection was appropriate and showcased the unique talents of the school's performers and technicians, producing elements of quality musical theater.

OUR APPROACH TO FEEDBACK

At the heart of The Spotlight Awards program is the belief that feedback fuels growth. Our adjudication process isn't just about selecting winners - it's about celebrating student achievement, encouraging artistry and strengthening the educational impact of musical theatre in our community.

The Spotlight Awards is designed to be educational, not competitive. Spotlight encourages the development of a growth mindset, helping participants to recognize feedback as an opportunity to hone their ever-evolving skill sets. It is important for ALL participating adults and students to remember that the Spotlight Awards program is educational at its core, designed to provide feedback in all areas, for all participants. **It is expected that each participant in the program will join us in fostering a sense of community and collaboration rather than competition.**

Our program's strength resides in the knowledge that we celebrate each performer and school, allowing everyone to have their moment ***in the spotlight****, never dimming another's light. When one school succeeds, it strengthens the entire high school theater community. By sharing artistry, ideas and inspiration we build a region where every student can thrive, on stage, backstage and beyond.*

Non-Competitive Spirit
No two schools are alike, which is why this program is NOT competitive. Schools are given feedback based on a storytelling-focused rubric, never in relation to other schools. It is our hope that students and adults involved in the Spotlight Awards will never compare themselves to other participants but instead will choose to celebrate their own individual areas of accomplishment.

School Recognition
Recognitions are abundant throughout this program, acknowledging outstanding work happening in every participating school. We ask participants to make the choice to focus on the positive growth and achievement found within their own program. There is so much to be celebrated. If a certain school is not nominated this time, it should not be viewed as a negative reflection on the performance. It is impossible to recognize every deserving school simultaneously. We hope all participants will join us in celebrating their peers, focusing on their own program's unique growth, and uplifting our collective arts community. **Each school's hard work remains outstanding and deeply valued.**

Determining Nominees
To determine nominations and recipients of each award, the nominee selection panel considers a variety of factors, and looks at all eligible candidates with a fresh perspective by thoroughly reviewing the Adjudicator feedback, rubric-aligned scoring, photos, our commitment to community and inclusion, and mandatory support material. Scores are used as an indicator, with nominations including top scoring schools as well as Judge's Choice selections. Eligibility for awards is at the discretion of the Spotlight Awards administration, which reserves the right to amend rules, overrule adjudicators, or select additional nominees as necessary to maintain a fair process.

ENCOURAGING A GROWTH MINDSET

Feedback can be daunting, especially for young performers just starting their journey to the stage. **Giving and receiving feedback is crucial for an actor's growth.** Effective feedback focuses on specific behaviors, not personality, and is delivered with honesty and respect. Receiving feedback well involves active listening, reflection, and a willingness to learn and improve.

What is a growth mindset?

- The belief that success comes from ongoing personal development, and skills and abilities can grow through effort, learning and practice. **We are always learning!**
- A focus on development in setbacks - You bounce back, pick yourself up, and try again. A growth mindset embraces challenges and views failure not as evidence of limitations, but as a springboard for growth.
- Focus on continuously improving your skills and abilities, rather than "winning".
- Open to constructive criticism, realizing it creates growth, the chance to learn, improve and develop skills.

Strategies for Fostering a Growth Mindset in the Classroom

Helping students develop a growth mindset requires deliberate effort from teachers, but many of the methods can be easily integrated into existing practices.

- Set goals. Helping students set incremental, achievable goals demonstrates the attainability of growth and progress.
- Normalize struggle and provide challenges. Struggle is part of the learning process and emphasizing and reinforcing that idea helps students react positively when they feel challenged. Part of developing a growth mindset is teaching students to overcome obstacles.
- Embrace the word "yet". If someone makes the statement "I'm not a math person," adding a simple qualifier will signal that a process exists for gaining ability. "You're not a math person **yet**."
- Demonstrate mistakes and celebrate corrections. Mistakes should be viewed as learning opportunities. Teachers can model this outlook in reactions to their own mistakes and steps they take to correct a mistake.
- Reward improvement rather than results. When praising someone for a job well done, highlight the **journey** they took rather than an end product. When we recognize the effort and persistence behind a good result, rather than attributing it to innate qualities, our feedback is more meaningful and encourages the recipient to revisit those positive behaviors when faced with their next challenge.
- Celebrate growth. This reinforces the emphasis on effort and process. It also provides opportunities to share valuable learnings. **Celebrate all achievements!**
- Develop cooperative exercises. Working together to solve problems emphasizes process and reinforces the importance of getting help and finding solutions. It also de-emphasizes individual outcomes.
- Don't oversimplify. "You can do anything!" may feel like harmless encouragement, but if students aren't put in a position to overcome challenges, they'll conclude that such statements are empty, and the feedback will lose credibility.

The goal isn't perfection - it's progress, reflection, and a shared love for the art of storytelling.

EFFECTIVELY GIVING FEEDBACK

Effective feedback for auditions should be specific, constructive, and delivered with care. It's important to focus on the actor's performance and offer actionable suggestions for improvement, while also acknowledging positive aspects of their audition. Avoid vague comments and focus on specific acting elements.

1) "What worked?"
These should be observable responses.

- *I could hear you clearly.*
- *I liked the interaction and connection with your scene partner.*
- *The emotional peak was powerful.*

2) "What needs work?"
The point here is that **everything needs polish**. Again, this should be mostly observable.

- *Your articulation was unclear.*
- *I wish the confrontation moment with your scene partner had been more "all in," you seemed to hold back.*
- *I wonder what would happen if you tried a more complex emotion than anger.*

General Rules

- Let the artist know that they can accept or ignore the comments. That is their prerogative, but they should not argue; just listen. The only thing that they can verbalize is to ask questions for clarification.
- Avoid giving feedback that isn't constructive:
    - Never use your own artistic impulses for feedback ("I would have…") or compare to other versions ("When I performed as that character…" or "When I saw this on Broadway…").
    - Feedback that only gushes praise (such as friends and family) may be nice to hear, but it will not help you find new strategies to grow.
    - Don't be a critic that is more interested in your own cleverness than in actually helping polish the performance.

Framing Your Feedback
Consider setting up a basic outline of how you want to present the feedback. One idea is to follow this pattern:
I saw… (the observable)
I liked… (the positive)
I wish… (for a change that might improve the performance)
I wonder… (musings on the performance with an eye to improvement)

Example Sentence Starters - *Phrasing in terms of growth*

- ✓ Keep working towards…
- ✓ Continue to work on…
- ✓ Consider…
- ✓ In the future, you might try….
- ✓ I loved when you…..keep bringing that [energy/focus/etc.] to the rest of your performance…
- ✓ You did [this] well. To take your performance to the next level….
- ✓ Have you considered…?
- ✓ What would happen next time if…

WRITTEN FEEDBACK – KEY REMINDERS

When in doubt – remind yourself that this is about the STUDENTS. They are young people, learning about the industry that we all love, and we want to help them grow on their educational journey. Always err on the side of higher scores and kinder comments.

Key Reminders:

- ✓ Keep in mind that your written feedback goes directly to the school and will be read by real people who put their heart and soul into the production.
- ✓ Celebrate students and directors wherever they are on their journey.
- ✓ Do not make comparisons to other shows, versions, youtube videos, or versions you have (or would have) directed yourself.
- ✓ Stay positive: Putting on a show is stressful. As theater practitioners, we know and understand this. Evaluations should be fair and contain useful language that furthers growth in the art form. Language should reflect what you saw and areas of growth but should be something that could be given to a student without edit.
- ✓ Honor the Director's expertise: The school team members are participating in this program because they care about their students and want them to have experiences in theater. They are experts in their classrooms and on their students. Honor this expertise and recognize that, especially as adults, learning something completely new can feel intimidating and uncomfortable at times.
- ✓ Respect the Director's workload: Receiving feedback is a skill. Learning a new skill and tackling outside opinions on top of an already rigorous school schedule and production experience can be a huge undertaking. Be mindful of their time and resources.

Feedback to Avoid

- ✓ When giving a compliment, try not to write a positive followed directly by a negative. As an example, "You have great acting instincts, but I wanted more." Do not tie the two thoughts together with a conjunction. Instead let the positive stand alone as its own thought, then frame the areas to improve or things to take into consideration. Example, "You have great acting instincts. Consider digging deeper into your character's motivations."
- ✓ Avoid words like "awkward," "disappointing," "gangly," etc. Written feedback should always be appropriate for a high school student to read.
- ✓ Additionally, please avoid using the word "outstanding" – this is the naming used for our awards and may be confusing.
- ✓ Adjudicators should not provide feedback based on health and safety concerns, how the adjudicator would have directed the show, food and drink accommodations for the adjudicator, or parking accommodations for the adjudicator. If any of these elements were an issue or logistical complication for you or other patrons, adjudicators may share this in the "Spotlight Eyes Only" section if they think it should be addressed. These things should not be written as performance feedback or be part of scoring.
- ✓ Avoid the urge to oversimplify in your praise. "You can do anything!" or "You should be on Broadway!" may feel like harmless and/or helpful encouragement, but in an educational feedback setting statements like this without specifics or constructive elements often feel empty, causing your feedback to lose credibility.

WRITTEN FEEDBACK – KEY REMINDERS AND CHECK LIST

Feedback/Comment Check List

- ✓ Does my feedback celebrate something the students or team did well?
- ✓ Does my comment give insight into one or more areas and include a clear strategy for improvement?
- ✓ Does my comment reference at least one specific moment or example that illustrates the point(s) I am trying to make?
- ✓ Does my feedback include at least 3-4 complete, easy-to-read sentences per question?
- ✓ Is my feedback written in a positive tone and framed in an educational and helpful way?
- ✓ Is my feedback written in clear and concise language?
- ✓ Did I score/comment on the storytelling abilities put to work in each production, regardless of budget and spectacle? Did I focus on the ability to tell a cohesive story and how available resources were effectively used?

Scoring Considerations/Check List

- ✓ Are my scores representative of a fair and unbiased professional opinion?
- ✓ Did I score/comment on the storytelling abilities put to work in each production, regardless of budget and spectacle? Did I focus on the ability to tell a cohesive story and how available resources were effectively used?
- ✓ Did I score every category at a perfect score? (If so, please look through the rubric for more discernment on scoring.)
- ✓ Did I score every category in the lowest category? (If so, please look through the rubric again to ensure this is accurate.)
- ✓ Did I nominate students in every category? (If not, please look through the playbill again and see if there are others you can nominate. Leaving a nomination slot blank should be a rare choice, not a consistent one.)
- ✓ Look again at your information email at the "Qualifying Roles" list. Did you score all of them in the Lead Performer section? (Also, did you list someone not in that listing? If so, please remove them – Lead Performer scores should include all Qualifying Roles, and no additional scores.)
- ✓ Did I score all eligible categories?
- ✓ Do my scores reflect the written feedback I provided?
- ✓ Did I vary my nominations when possible?