By the time the students completed the song a second time, Watson knew exactly which passages they needed to emphasize.

"You're hitting your accents good," he said. "You're tight. You all sound like a jazz band. Most high school bands don't do that. Now I want you to start exaggerating your dynamics more. And don't get any louder."

During one interlude, the saxophones weren't hitting their grace notes effectively. Watson demonstrated how it should be done on his own horn before requiring each saxophonist to try the passage individually. Then he paused to compliment the drummer.

"You control the dynamics," Watson told him. "You swing. You push the band. I'm impressed."

The band's pianist, senior Alfa O'Neal, appreciated all the tips.

"Bobby is an excellent instructor," Alfa said. "To have a guy like Bobby come around and teach us some things is truly a blessing."

Just outside the practice room, students clamored around Monk as if he were a rap star.

"Right now is a good time for jazz education," Monk told me. "I'm seeing the same enthusiasm everywhere. I visit high schools from coast to coast. Every high school wants a jazz band. That represents where jazz is in our cultural psyche."

Monk believes he knows why so many young people are choosing to play jazz.

"It has to do with issues of individuality, with teamwork and with self-expression," he said. "In jazz you find that all these dynamics are present, the dynamics that drive jazz drive hip hop."

Monk holds deep respect for Kansas City's musical roots.

"Kansas City is truly one of the centers of the jazz universe," Monk said. "It's perhaps the first true center."