What is your favorite music-related app and why?

**Stacy Clark, La Vernia HS Band, La Vernia ISD:** This is a hard question to answer because I use several different apps, depending on the class. However, TonalEnergy Chromatic Tuner is an app I use with beginners through high school students. For an app, it has one of the most accurate tuners (I’ve tested several), and the fact that it also has a metronome is a definite plus! It also has a tone generator; you can see an analysis of sound; and you can record a student and play it back so they can hear and see their sounds. And of course, I have to mention Mr. Smiley—students love getting the green smiley face when they play in tune!

**Scott Mason, Coppell HS Band, Coppell ISD:** The Practice Center app allows my students to make videos of themselves taking a playing test, passing off music, or showing me how they practice. This app has a camera and a metronome that can be used while they make the recording or as a silent beat. It also has a timer on it and tuning drones that they can use to hear the relationships between intervals and their music.

**Douglas Morris, Lamesa HS Band, Lamesa ISD:** I am a big fan of DaTuner Pro Chromatic Tuner app for my Android device. This app is a great tuner and easy to use. There is a “Lite” version that is free. Since most of our students have smartphones, we are embracing the technology and utilizing it to the fullest. Our students place their phones on their stands for every rehearsal. It is making a huge difference in their awareness of natural pitch tendencies. This app is readily available, as are similar apps for metronomes.

**Eric Rokohl, C.E. King HS Band, Sheldon ISD:** For me, it is a tie between Frozen Ape’s Tempo and Tempo SlowMo. I find both very helpful for personal and classroom use. Frozen Ape Tempo is a fully-featured metronome that I can use during class and I can create set lists with it for when I need to preset certain tempi. I like to use Tempo SlowMo with students to help them slow down technical passages so they can develop a better understanding of the passage rather than guessing because they just hear a blur.

**Jonathan Sweet, A&M Consolidated HS Band, College Station ISD:** I am a big fan of forScore. It allows me to import scores that our groups are working on (marching band music, pep music, concert literature, chamber music, etc). It is convenient not to have to carry around or look for small scores. Additionally, I like to project scores for the students to see while we are working on them. Students then have real-world knowledge of what is going on and can synthesize that with what they are hearing.

**Gary Williams, Cockrill MS Band, McKinney ISD:** My favorite app is called 30/30. It’s not music related, but it transfers incredibly well to our band classes. It operates as a fully customiz­able task list and has been extremely helpful in maximizing every single second of our classroom instruction. Best of all—it’s free!

**Liz Householder, The String Society, Spring:** I love the Sing With The Best app because even though it’s geared toward singers, I can use it with string players. It includes a tuner and it also measures the speed of your vibrato. When I’m training vibrato with intermediate- to advanced-level students, I love to be able to

To review all the apps recommended by TMEA members who answered this question, go to www.tMEA.org/tutti.
show them what different speeds of vibrato look and sound like.

Kathy Aldridge, Private Instructor/Vocal, The Woodlands: My favorite app has become Music Teacher’s Helper. It’s made for private music teachers and has become the center of my private studio business. It offers a helpful calendar, student records, expense records, mileage records, payments, invoices, appointments/lessons, and more.

Andrea Hutchison, Clute IS Choir, Brazosport ISD: Blob Chorus Ear Training is my students’ favorite app! It offers a great ear training game. Each blob sings a pitch, and then the King Blob sings one. You select the blob that sang the same pitch as King Blob. If you guess wrong, the blob explodes! I use it with groups, and students hold up fingers for their answer. It’s great for that last five minutes or as a warm-up activity.

Sandra Divnick, Regency Place ES, North East ISD: NotateMe Now is a traditional notation app that is free (with an option to upgrade). It intelligently learns students’ handwriting, and gives them the opportunity to practice creating/improvising/editing music. After they write their notes on the staff, the app translates their handwriting into computer-generated notes on the staff and plays it back for them. It’s very engaging!

Curtis Donohue, Rummel Creek ES, Spring Branch ISD: Three Ring app has transformed the way I assess and record my students’ progress in class. Three Ring allows me to take notes, make audio/video recordings, and enter assignments and grades using my mobile device. I have the app on my iPhone, iPad, and computer. Anything I add on one device is automatically synced to the others. The recording function has been particularly helpful with playing tests. When students or parents have a question about a grade, I can play the recording for them, explain specific problems, and reevaluate the grade assigned if needed.

Patrick Lollis, Cannon ES, Grapevine-Colleyville: MetaXylo+ is a free Orff keyboard emulator. Students can choose metallophone or xylophone and can change the key. They can also remove notes they don’t need by double-clicking the note name. There is an English version of the app with letter names and a French version that uses fixed do (helpful only in the key of C).

What technology do you use often in instruction or assessment?

Conrad Flusche, Mexia JH Band, Mexia ISD: We use a Mimio board projection system. I display rhythm slides and can mark on the displayed image projected onto our whiteboard. One click and the marks are gone. I use my iPhone to advance to the next slides.

Tiffany McWilliams, Kilgore MS Band, Kilgore ISD: Teacher iPad—I use it to take roll and project information on the board, as well as to record, tune, and do counting exercises. Right now I am using it to answer these questions.

Eric Rokohl, C.E. King HS Band, Sheldon ISD: Bluetooth technology—instead of hooking up a loudspeaker inside, we invested in a couple of inexpensive Bluetooth receivers we purchased online and paired our phones and computers to it for playback. This gives us mobile access to metronomes, drones, recordings, etc.
How do you ensure proper pacing in a beginner class?

Amanda Ransom, Henry MS Choir, Leander ISD: I use my Roland RM 700 digital piano all the time! I have our accompanist come in and record the accompaniments for our songs and use those recordings in rehearsal. We record MIDI files so I can slow them down or speed them up, transpose, or layer in voice parts as needed. My students learn how to use it and can rehearse themselves when we split into sections. I honestly don’t know what I would do without this piano.

Curtis Donohue, Rummel Creek ES, Spring Branch ISD: I find myself using the Reflector AirPlay receiver by Squirrel every day. It allows me to project my iPad, iPhone, laptop, or other device wirelessly, using any projector hooked up to a computer. This means I can run Peterson’s iStroboSoft tuner app on my iPad while walking around the room, and the kids can see it clearly projected on the board. At $11, this is a much cheaper alternative than other devices that do the same thing for over $99.

Patrick Lollis, Cannon ES, Grapevine-Colleyville ISD: My students use Zondle every day. It’s a free app/website usable on a computer, tablet, or smartphone. The teacher creates topics (or borrows them) and assigns them to classes. The students choose one of the assigned topics and a game they like to play while studying. They get lots of good practice embedded in fun games and get detailed feedback on each student’s progress within the various topics.

Mark Parker, Robinson ES, Clear Creek ISD: I have been using iDoceo, a great app for keeping grades, seating charts, calendars, schedules, and more. It is colorful and keeps so much information all in one place. You can even store pictures of your students in the seating chart area, which is great to print out for a substitute. You can find iDoceo on the App Store. As yet I have not seen this app available for other formats.

Sara Yancey, Hodges ES, Lubbock ISD: I use an interactive whiteboard every day in my elementary music classroom. It has been a lifesaver. I organize my lessons using it. Each morning, all I have to do is retrieve a grade-level activity and everything I need for that lesson is up and ready to use. Our SMART Board also allows me to provide the students with interactive activities for practice and assessment purposes. I can set it up with beats and rhythm choices for students to drag the correct rhythms after hearing a rhythm pattern, or as a cloze rhythm practice within known songs. I can set up a relay game where students choose rhythm or melody motives from aural examples. The game is set up to reinforce when correct and not respond on incorrect responses.

Allyson Wells, Houston Community College NW: To my surprise, I often use YouTube. When I hear an interesting piece of music on the radio as I’m driving to campus, I can walk into the classroom, cue up a YouTube video of the piece, have the students comment on what they’re hearing, and have them try to notate it. I can email a link to the video to the students during class for their further listening/viewing. This is a wonderful supplement to our other aural-skills exercises and resources. It’s also great for the students to see what the performers look like. For instance, many of the students at our community college have never had the opportunity to attend a performance by a professional orchestra.

Randy Bloodworth, Retired Band Director, Spring: As the beginners progress through the beginning band book in use, the class is tested each day on one or two of the lines assigned the day before. If the majority of the students can successfully perform the line, the class moves forward. The students are also placed in chair order according to their performance skill level evaluated through this line test. The students get to the point that they are motivated by the chair placement they receive on the test.

Christian Holzer, Stafford MS Band, Frisco ISD: You can generally read a beginner class pretty well through body language. In a typical beginner class you should have two primary goals: (1) It should be educational. Students should be respectful and actively participating at all times. If a student is not attentive they are most likely not learning. As the teacher, you must know the level of every student to help them. This starts by hearing them individually as much as possible. Never spend more than 8–10 minutes on one concept. (2) You must have fun! Tell a joke—the lamer the better, and ask them questions. Set a ground rule from day one that you are the teacher, and they must be polite and raise their hands to speak.

Stanford Lewis, Chavez HS Band, Houston ISD: The best way to check for proper pacing is to watch the students. As you teach the material, they will let you know through their actions if the pace is right. Students who are enthusiastic, but can’t play with acceptable sounds, are moving too quickly. You need to slow them down and work on the fundamentals. Students who play well, but don’t seem very interested, are moving too slowly. Try spicing up the lessons with a few extras in all sections. You can give them more challenging notes to learn or more complicated rhythms on specific notes. Pacing is everything and in the end will be one of the deciding factors as to when the first performance will be. In a nutshell, listen to the group and the individual sounds, and the pacing will reveal itself to you.

Amber Metzner, Alamo Heights HS Band, Alamo Heights ISD: At all times, I try to be sure that I understand the capabilities and needs of the most advanced students and the least advanced students. I base the range of my instruction between those extremes. Each day I return to the beginning of the unit and then inch forward, making sure that the most advanced student is challenged as well.

Linda Smith, Westbury Christian School Band, Houston: We make sure each student plays individually for the class every day. With short class periods, this is done by turning on the metronome and going down the row. It doesn’t take very long and students are held responsible for their practicing. It also helps us assess mastery both individually and for the class.

Warren Seago, Aragon MS Band, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD: Take the time to hear each student every week in addition to performance testing. Time must be taken to hear every student on a skill and assist those who need help with mastery. I teach my beginner classes more like a master class where everyone is involved in the discussion.

Tracy Collins, Kaufman HS Choir, Kaufman ISD: Use sight singing books and monitor individuals as they sing. Divide the
choir into sections and allow the section leader to control the pace of their section.

Carol Pyle, Choral Clinician and Private Voice Instructor, Weatherford: Consistent small-group assessment allows me to know where each individual is on the material being covered. I give a short rhythm assignment set, for example, and hear small groups perform alternate lines of it together in the rehearsal. I can tell what each member did, if the groups are small enough (3–5 students), and I give a pass/fail grade (with + and – also) on my seating chart. I hear everyone at least twice a week on some elements of the fundamentals they are learning. The assessment then guides the pace of instruction and the strategies to be adjusted for some individuals.

Bonnie Kuehl, Iduma ES, Killeen ISD: The awareness of students’ nonverbal communication is critical. If there is a lot of shifting in chairs and blank looks, it’s a signal to reteach. One of the other things I’ve seen work well is to employ peer tutoring and working in small groups (usually no more than four students per group) to offer opportunity for students to figure out the details of the concepts. The small-group format allows the teacher to move among the groups and more efficiently determine where students are being successful and where they need more support. Making notes allows me to modify my lesson plans to ensure better understanding. I have also found that how I format my questions makes a difference in how students express themselves. I feel it’s important to help students understand what they know and what they yet need to learn.

How do you balance your work life and your home life?

Bill Watson, Lewisville ISD: I actually plan out both work time and leisure time on my iPhone and stick to it.

Jack Brossette, Paducah HS Band, Paducah ISD: We try to get everything done during the workday, thereby limiting after-school rehearsals. Non-competition weekends are my time, and I do nothing work-related, unless it is an emergency. Living in a small town, we try to get out of town once a month for a break.

Christian Holzer, Stafford MS Band, Frisco ISD: A great idea I got from a parent was to leave your cell phone by the door when you get home. It really helps!

David Jasso, East Montana MS Band, Clint ISD: I leave work at work, and when I’m home, I’m home—no exceptions.

Ryan Kersey, Clear Lake HS Band, Clear Creek ISD: I’ve found that the day-to-day housekeeping eats up more time than it deserves. Staying ultra-organized has helped me cut that down by a fair bit. I tried keeping formal to-do lists but never could keep them current. I have, however, found new success keeping in/out boxes labeled Today, This Week, Later (1+ weeks), and File Me. The today box is on top and I know I must clear it by the end of the day. The rest helps me keep an organized timeline without it turning into a big to-do pile that has no context for completion.

Alison Maguire-Powell, de Zavala MS Band, Irving ISD: This isn’t as hard for me, since I don’t have children yet, but I make
sure that when I’m home with my husband I am truly present and paying attention. I try to make sure that the time we have together is quality time. I also maintain non-musical hobbies—I play roller derby a few hours a week and it’s a great outlet for stress.

Scott Mason, Coppell HS Band, Coppell ISD: I find this to be the single greatest concern of my life presently. We sometimes create our own monsters in what we develop our programs to become. I believe that each year you do not have to top the previous year. You will receive pressure from parents, students, administration, and even yourself to do so. You have to take the time in the summer to evaluate what you want to accomplish this year and how much time to dedicate to each project, and then try to stay within those guidelines. I also believe I don’t utilize the resources around me as much as I should, whether they be other directors, teachers, parents, or students.

Leigh McClain, Griffin MS Band, Lewisville ISD: Being a parent with my own children in band has really helped me with balance. If your own children and family can’t manage your band schedule, you might have a problem! Witnessing my own kids’ attitudes toward the program has helped me build a more family-friendly environment. It’s not about time spent, but how you choose to spend that time.

Douglas Morris, Lamesa HS Band, Lamesa ISD: One of the most difficult things for music educators to do is say no. There will always be something we need to do at school, always someone asking for something else. We have to learn to say no. Whatever you are working on will be there tomorrow. My wonderful wife of 27 years has taught me how to see the difference between those things that must be done today and those I want to get done today. When I am well-rested, mentally and physically, I am better at my job. Putting in unnecessary hours becomes counterproductive. We must prioritize.

Bryan Buffaloe, Clear Lake HS Orchestra, Clear Creek ISD: This very subject is why so many young teachers burn out and leave the profession. The fact is, you do not have to give up your life and live at your school to be successful. Although many do, it is a choice, not a necessity. I would suggest planning your home/family time first. Block off 1–2 evenings a week when you will not do school-related work. Then plan the remainder of your week around your personal time. Although it makes for a long day, plan extra rehearsals or sectional on just a few days rather than every day. Block out one afternoon to get paperwork done and shut down the rehearsal room from students so you are not interrupted. Most importantly, remember you are only one person trying to take care of many. Ask parents if someone is willing to come in once or twice a week to make copies, file music, create a program, organize and issue uniforms, and collect money. You will be surprised at how much this takes off your plate.

Robert Dierdorf, Katy HS Choir, Katy ISD: There is no perfect answer. Try to be efficient at your job and use your time wisely, but if you are married to your work, there will be problems. If something needs to give, it should be your job yielding to your family. After having heart bypass surgery five years ago, my priorities got quickly adjusted for me. We often define ourselves by our work, but our jobs are never as important as our families. I also learned to let job stress roll off me more so as not to bring it home to my family.

Sean Pullen, West Texas A&M Univ Choir: Even though I cannot boast of any mastery in this area, I’ll offer my thoughts. Anything of quality requires time and effort. No one can achieve excellence at the office without putting in the hours and sweat. If the family is more important than the job, it stands to reason that our exertion at home must be greater than it is at work. I doubt any of us who expect a high standard in our occupation could honestly say that our rigor at work equals our energy at home. We must try harder. If we really think about it, it is not about balance. Our loved ones should tip the scale to a point of imbalance in their favor. So what is the solution? We need to go home at a decent hour. We need to talk to our spouses like they are the most important people in our lives. Our children need to know they are our favorite kids.

Amy Goode, Mathews ES, Austin ISD: During the school year, I set an alarm on my phone for the end of day in my teaching assignment—3:30 P.M. This keeps me from mindlessly working past the set school day. I might still put in extra time, but at least I am more mindful of how much I am staying late.