
T-TESS Insights for Music Educators

By Dr. Estelle Murr

Does the mere mention of *T-TESS* make you want to run and hide? If you focus only on formal observations rather than recognizing the continuous, reflective nature of the model, it can be especially easy to fear the process. As you read on and consider the entirety of this process, begin by keeping in mind what T-TESS stands for: *Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System*.

As this academic year winds down, May is a valuable time for you to reflect on your personal and professional growth and begin shaping meaningful goals for the future. With the year's events and experiences fresh in your mind, you can identify strengths and areas for improvement and make a list of things you wish you knew and want to learn. Thinking now about how you want to grow, before the demands of summer or the hectic start of a new school year, can heighten the effectiveness of both goal-setting and planning, taking the edge off the start of next school year.

GOAL SETTING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (GSPD)

The GSPD is designed for teachers, not their administrators. While it may feel like a *hoop to jump through* at the start of each year, May is the ideal time to proactively begin this work. By reflecting on the year's successes and challenges now, educators can develop well-informed, strategic goals rather than rushing through the process at the beginning of the next school year. Thoughtfully crafted GSPDs allow music educators to identify areas for growth, select meaningful professional development opportunities, and set a foundation for continued improvement.

When completing part one (Data Analysis and Goal Setting), music educators often struggle with identifying relevant data. The data analysis component has two key areas: student assessment data and professional growth data. The chief takeaway is that this data is not being used to set student goals for improvement; this data is driving ideas for *teacher improvement* that can increase efficacy, broaden the knowledge base, improve practice, and ultimately increase student achievement. When music teachers improve their craft, students benefit! That said, it can be difficult to

complete the GSPD worksheet without knowing what data to list or how to articulate it in ways appraisers will understand.

Data used to identify student assessment: "Curriculum-correlated assessment data" can include any teacher- or third-party-designed music aptitude tests. "Teacher-designed assessments" can include daily or discrete visual and aural assessments in addition to formal assessments. This includes chair tests, passoffs, tests for vocal range or fach, program auditions, and more. To satisfy "Cumulative student performance/classroom data," teachers can utilize their concert and contest reviews and ratings as a form of student data to guide their goal setting.

Data used to identify professional growth: While this is not an exhaustive list, the following are examples of data regularly collected or received in music classrooms and performances. "Formal evaluation results" are derived from the previous year's T-TESS score or other summative evaluation from your appraiser that guide areas for improvement. "Supervisor, colleague and/or peer feedback" can include feedback from appraisers in a walkthrough, from faculty in PLCs, and UIL ratings/commentary (adjudicators are peers). For "Analysis of the learning environment practices and expertise," teachers can use their self-evaluation of conducting and rehearsal techniques to guide their professional growth.

The T-TESS Cycle begins with the Goal-Setting and Professional Development (GSPD) plan, moves through the three-part evaluation cycle, and concludes with the annual summative conference.

SETTING GOALS FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

The data is used to set two or three goals for professional growth. Teachers decide what they want to achieve and the correlating T-TESS dimension for each goal (there are 16 dimensions to choose

Administrators take growth seriously and are trained to assist teachers, regardless of their subject content. The requisite Advanced Educational Leadership (AEL) certification and training to become a T-TESS appraiser is rigorous, and, like educators, administrators engage with their supervisors in T-PESS for administrative growth.

from). Then teachers list two or three actions that will help them accomplish a goal. Actions vary based on the goal but can be anything a teacher does to improve their craft, such as reading a book or journal article, attending a seminar or other professional development, observing a master teacher, taking one of TMEA's online courses, listening to music new to the PML, or serving on a Region committee. There is no limit to the number of actions educators can take to improve, so don't feel boxed into traditional forms of professional development. This is an opportunity to customize learning activities of interest you believe will help you improve.

Next is to select a targeted completion date, which will vary based on the goal. Is the goal short- or long-term? Does the goal depend on an event? Teachers will set more than one goal, and they do not need the same targeted completion date. Appraisers should be consulted for any target date that is later than April 1 since data collection would not be analyzed prior to the summative conference.

The final piece is the evidence of goal attainment. How will the teacher know their goal has been met? *Measurable goals are best.* How will the teacher track whether their efforts impacted instructional practices and student achievement? *Description of data collection or assessments is acceptable.*

SUBMITTING YOUR GSPD

Teachers must submit their GSPD plan to their appraiser within the first six weeks of school annually. When appraisers review GSPDs from their teachers, they gain insight into the teachers' professional and personal goals, as well as their needs and aspirations for training. This process also provides an opportunity to begin building a meaningful relationship.

Music educators who take the time to craft thoughtful GSPDs set themselves up for success, not only through the actions they have planned but also through being vulnerable and sharing their journey with their appraiser. This motivates appraisers to invest in teacher growth by providing assistance, support, and encouragement along the way. Regardless of whether the appraiser understands music, they have tools at their disposal to assist teachers as they improve. Appraisers may not be able to subdivide a rhythmic passage, but they can remove many of the roadblocks teachers face during the school year. Music teachers concerned with their appraiser's lack of musical content knowledge can use their GSPD to educate their appraiser about their teaching practices, bridging gaps so that their work is not as foreign to the appraiser.

GOAL REFLECTION

Part two of the T-TESS process is completed prior to the summative conference at the end of the year. Teachers should be prepared to discuss all facets of their journey, along with reflective responses to their selected measures of goal attainment. This should lead to discussions about the following year's goals. Quality GSPDs get easier every year because they build upon the previous year or are preselected during the prior summative conference. Teachers should not need to reinvent the wheel. If the wheel of growth never stops moving, teachers simply modify and adjust to meet their ongoing personal and professional needs.

The GSPD process happens every year whether a teacher is required to have a formal observation or not. T-TESS starts with the GSPD, because this creates the lens from which walkthroughs, observations, and conferences are viewed and framed. When appraisers have a thorough understanding of what and how a teacher wants to learn and grow, the entire year and process becomes a *customized support system*.

THE EVALUATION CYCLE

The T-TESS evaluation cycle has three parts: (1) Pre-Conference, (2) Observation, and (3) Post-Conference. Preparing for and actively participating in the pre-conference is integral for music educators. The purpose of the pre-conference is for the teacher and appraiser to discuss the upcoming observation lesson with a focus on the planning domain. During formal observations, appraisers are focused predominantly on Domains 2 and 3; what teachers provide and articulate in the pre-conference is the best opportunity to ensure quantitative evidence for Domain 1. The pre-conference is also a music teacher's forum to translate their music lesson into language any appraiser will understand fully.



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What should students know and be able to do by the end of the lesson? Introduce musical terminology that will be used and explain the subtlety/nuance of musicality relative to the TEKS. What will the teacher and students be doing to show progress toward mastery of objectives? Explain rehearsal techniques, purpose and utilization of a tuner or metronome, how and why the lesson includes listening down the line, the need for repetition, etc. Include information about the lesson, the class, and the students.

When music teachers thoroughly prepare for their pre-conference and have quality discussions with their appraiser about their (1.1) standards and alignment, (1.2) data and assessment, (1.3) knowledge of students, and (1.4) activities, the observation itself is a breeze and simply a reflection of what they do every day. Pre-conferences should not be burdens or boxes being checked, rather *opportunities to bring appraisers into the world of music*. This is a private audience with school administration to advocate for music and let them see behind the curtain.


Following the formal observation, the post-conference provides teachers an opportunity to reflect on the execution of their lesson and receive support, guidance, and constructive feedback from their appraiser. Teachers' goals from the GSPD should be considered and guide discussions and feedback. It is important to remember that T-TESS was designed to be a *teacher support system* and not a pass/fail tool to simply find faults. The post-conference is intended to be an authentic and valuable dialogue between teacher and appraiser. If the GSPD and pre-conference are thorough and insightful, there will already be a relationship in place that is rooted in honesty, collaboration, perpetual growth, and receptiveness to two-way communication that includes constructive feedback.

Go to www.tmea.org/gspd or scan the code to access the T-TESS webpage and download a Goal Setting and PD Plan template from the Goal-Setting section.



USING T-TESS FOR IMPACT

Many music educators struggle building relationships with their administrators. The T-TESS model can provide opportunities for teacher growth, assisted by appraisers, and encourage relationship-building. Quality relationships rooted in a growth mindset go far beyond T-TESS, benefitting teachers' personal and professional growth and the advancement of music classrooms at all grade levels.

The efforts music educators put into the areas of goal setting, professional development, lesson planning, and focusing on instruction (including data analysis) lead to more productive rehearsals and classes. The better teachers get, the better students will perform. When teachers fully participate and use T-TESS the way it was intended, their efficacy will improve, their students and ensembles will improve, and they will have a stronger relationship with their administrators. Music educators will get out of T-TESS what they put into it, and it can be a powerful tool for growth. 



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Preparing for a Pre-Conference

Submit your lesson plan to your appraiser prior to the pre-conference so they have time to review.



About the Lesson

- How does *this* lesson relate to your TEKS?
- How does *this* lesson fall within scope & sequence?
- What *data* led you to plan *this* lesson?
- What knowledge of your students led you to plan *this* lesson?
- Why did you select these *specific* activities to master *this* lesson's objective?
- The majority of your Domain 1 score is a result of this pre-conference.



About the Class

- Is there anything about this class or environment that is different from the norm (e.g., beginner clarinet, ECSE music, MS third band, HS wind symphony)?
- Where is this class chronologically, relative to your performance calendar?
- What challenges does the environment cause?
- Describe the types of informal aural assessments that will occur in this specific environment.



About the Students

- Do any students in this class have specific needs or challenges?
- Tell your appraiser how many of these students have an IEP and give examples of how you have met their specific needs.
- Highlight your SDI and what special tools or assistive technology you may use. (Include special seating arrangements, music enlargements, tuners, drones, oversized sticks, etc.)
- Be proactive!