



TEAM Observation Considerations Music Educators

A music classroom allows an observer the opportunity to gather evidence of instructional practice in a setting where students' work may look or sound different than a traditional classroom setting. Strong instructional practice leads to improved student outcomes, and music is no exception. It is important that every district be given the autonomy to design a curriculum that is authentic to their population. Music educators are tasked with creating developmentally appropriate learning experiences that meet these standards. A music educator may teach [general music, instrumental music, or vocal music standards](#). It is important to be aware that these standards are purposefully broad to accommodate localized curriculum development. The way students are positioned, the instructional materials used, and the approach to literacy may make certain indicators particularly nuanced. This document aims to clarify some of these issues and to promote robust communication between educator and evaluator.

Literacy is essential across all academic areas because it enables students to learn and communicate effectively. The Tennessee Standards for Music Education emphasize artistic literacy, including visual thinking, aural literacy (audiation), and music notation. Music teachers should integrate multiple aspects of literacy within their discipline that align with the Tennessee Standards for Music Education.

Music provides students with opportunities for high-level critical thinking, artistic expression, and skill development. It helps students learn a second written language, refine physical coordination, and work both independently and collaboratively. Problem-solving in music is continuous, requiring immediate adjustments as students perform. Through creative decision-making, students develop skills in multitasking, time management, and teamwork.

While this document focuses on the work of music educators, the approach to using the TEAM rubric remains the same for any content area.

In this document you will find information on:

- [Pre-Conference Considerations](#)
- [Observer Considerations: Evidence Collection](#)
- [Observer Considerations: Preparing for the Post-Conference](#)

Pre-Conference Considerations:

In music education, long-term goals shape instruction, as individual lessons rarely encapsulate a complete learning objective. This is especially true in elementary general music, where infrequent meetings and short class times extend learning over time. Similarly, performance-based classes require ongoing reinforcement of fundamental skills before engaging with higher-level concepts in the Create, Respond, and Connect Domains.

In performance-based music classes, student understanding is demonstrated through rehearsal and performance. Across all music classes, students may compose, dictate melodies and rhythms, analyze music, arrange existing pieces, or engage in written tasks requiring critical thinking. The nature of these activities depends on the lesson's focus.

Fine Arts Standards do not equate skill levels directly to grade levels. Schools introduce band and orchestra at different times, and students enter programs with varying experience. What appears on paper as a uniform class may include students with widely differing knowledge and skill backgrounds, especially in schools with varying feeder programs. Teachers may also manage large class sizes with diverse skill levels, requiring differentiation that looks different from traditional classroom settings.

For more information about pre-conferences, sample discussion questions, educator preparation guidance, and rubric connections, see the [TEAM Teacher Evaluator Handbook](#).

Observer Considerations: Evidence Collection

Evidence for performance levels may come from pre-conference discussions, classroom observations, or follow-up conversations before the post-conference. Observers should focus on understanding the educator's instructional approach and, more importantly, how students respond to the strategies used. Gathering evidence on how the educator moves students toward mastery is essential. Additionally, understanding the unique layout and workflow of a music classroom is crucial, as strong instructional practices are present but may appear differently than in other subjects. The following are examples of evidence and considerations for evaluators and educators; this list is not exhaustive and may vary depending on the specific dynamics and characteristics of each classroom.

Planning Rubric		
Indicator	Possible Evidence	Considerations
Instructional Plans	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning notes that show how the teacher is aligning and sequencing student activities to the standards. Discussions with the educator about how instruction builds on prior learning. Discussions with the educator about how lessons address individual students' needs. Given that the music standards are based on sequential achievement levels rather than grade levels, at what level is the observed class functioning? Planning notes that indicate how frequently the teacher provides opportunities for students to reflect and give or receive feedback for skill improvement. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers may provide opportunities for students in an ensemble setting to work on individual goals while still performing in a whole group setting. Goals are less frequently set and met in a single lesson. Due to scheduling, objectives and sub-objectives may be taught over a period of several weeks. It is plausible for seventh grade and eighth-grade students to join ensembles for the first time, just as it is possible for sixth-grade students to possess advanced musical skills equivalent to higher grade level students.
Student Work	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussions between the educator and evaluator that provide insight into the planned student work, which in a music classroom may include a variety of assignments such as student recordings or live individual or group performances. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While there are possible written elements to student assignments, student understanding and interpretation of a text in this setting is primarily defined in terms of performance of music literature.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussions between the educator and evaluator that provide insight into how the teacher plans to support students' thinking in their work. In a music class, this may involve questioning or providing feedback on performances. Discussions between the educator and evaluator that provide insight into how effectively the teacher uses writing assignments to allow students to share their thinking and engage in problem-solving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing may not occur in every lesson but should occur within the unit of study. Examples of writing in the Music Classroom: annotation of text, rhythmic dictation, melodic dictation, adding drill/choreographic instructions to the text, composition (rhythmic/melodic), analysis of text (theoretical), identification of note names, identification of rhythmic values, critique of performances, goal setting, scale construction, dynamic analysis, phrase analysis, form analysis, song writing, bellringers, exit tickets, description of musical terminology. Text could include notated/composed music, recordings of musical works, or music performed by students.
Assessment	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning notes that describe the ways students can demonstrate mastery of the skill or standard. In the music classroom, this may include recordings of individuals or groups, live assessments in front of peers, vocalization of notational language, and other listed measures. Discussions about the use of informal assessments during the unit of study, which in a 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informal assessment is continually happening in performance-based music classes. The ability of the educator to listen and provide feedback in real-time is a core competency.

	<p>music classroom may include bellringers or exit tickets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussions about how the teacher assesses students' progression toward mastery of the standard, which in a music classroom is often done through student performances. 	
Instruction Rubric		
Indicator	Possible Evidence	Considerations
Standards and Objective	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress toward mastery of a standard, as measured through a combination of whole group, small group, and individual student performances. Clear communication of the daily sub-objective and expectations to the students. Student mastery of the daily sub-objective, demonstrated through performance, verbal responses, or written work. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A standard could be broken up into daily sub-objectives that lead to the progress of mastery of the targeted standard. Due to scheduling, objectives and sub-objectives may be taught over a period of several weeks. A student may achieve Perform standards differently in the ensemble setting than they would in general music, where other proficiencies may be more of the focus.
Motivating Students	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students' personal connection to the content through self-selection of music for performance or rehearsal, and/or selection of 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus, participation, and attitude of students in a rehearsal setting are clear indicators of student motivation.

	<p>instruments for rehearsal or performance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student exhibition of inquiry, curiosity, and exploration through the creation or improvisation of new music and through responses to recorded or performed music. • Teacher reinforcement of student effort, which may include specific verbal or written feedback, questioning, praise, or repetition of student responses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators should be rewarding effort regardless of skill level.
Presenting Instructional Content	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content presentation that includes exemplar recordings, teacher-modeled music, or visuals of notations and patterns. • Content that is presented in an organized manner, demonstrating scaffolding from basic to complex concepts. • Scripting notes that reflect how well students are able to follow instructions and execute tasks. • Scripting notes that describe how students manage the space and/or instruments or voices through grouping. • Scripting notes that capture how modeling is performed by the teacher and/or the students. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visuals may include musical notation, lead sheets, labels in music, graphics that support skills, and informational keys to understand musical symbols. • Though the teacher may not always refer to the visuals, there could be evidence that students use the visuals during the lesson or practice. • A music educator may model thinking by explaining their process to count a rhythm, identify notes, or sight read a new piece of music.

Lesson Structure and Pacing	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student and teacher awareness of the time needed for transitions throughout the lesson. • Opportunities for students to self-reflect on their learning and progression toward mastery of a skill, lesson objective, or standard. • Allocated time for student practice and responses to instruction. • A balance of dialogue where the educator is not in control of the conversation the entire time, allowing for student-led discussion. • Students' ability to gather needed materials for class efficiently. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student self-reflection could be found intertwined throughout the lesson in conversation and not just in an exit ticket or end of the lesson. • Reflection might be found in the form of group discussion after a performance, individual written journals, responses to growth portfolio, individual student choice of skill practice during independent work time, or non-verbal responses to educator questions. • Evaluators need to keep in mind that students will have different experience and skill levels and may progress at different rates.
Activities and Materials	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities and materials used in the lesson that create opportunities for student-to-student engagement. • Activities that are aligned with the rigor of the standard. • Evidence of student-owned learning and curiosity. • Incorporation of student experiences, interests, and real-life situations into lessons and activities. • Students being challenged in their thinking and encouraged to engage in self-reflection. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging materials may look different for individual students or groups of students because they should be aligned with the class's overall/individual student skill levels. • The observer should not confuse grade level and skill level. • Refer to the thinking indicator for examples of thinking in a music classroom. • Text includes notated/composed music,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of technology resources to support or enhance student learning. 	<p>recordings of musical works, or music performed by students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-to-student interaction may occur through whole group or small group performance, visual cues, or through activities requiring verbal or written responses. • Student work products may include students accompanying a poem or story, improvising a melody or accompaniment, or constructing/performing an original musical idea (composed or improvised).
Questioning	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question-and-answer sessions between the teacher and students, as well as between students, to identify the types of questions being used. • Evidence of teacher wait time. • The types of questions the teacher asks to assess students' understanding of the task. • How the educator asks questions, whether directed to individuals or the entire group, and how those questions are used to determine student understanding. • How students are challenged to cite evidence from musical texts when responding to questions. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text includes notated/composed music, recordings of musical works, or music performed by students. • Answers to questions may not always be spoken or written but expressed through performance.

Academic Feedback	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback provided to students, either as individuals or in groups/ensembles, including the delivery method and the nature of the feedback. • How students give feedback to one another and support each other's skill development. • How consistently students are encouraged to self-monitor and correct mistakes. • How students react to and adjust based on teacher feedback. • Corrections and adjustments made by the teacher based on feedback provided by students regarding their learning. • Whether feedback is specific and academically focused, or primarily motivational. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to classroom layout, teachers may or may not have the ability to circulate to each student. The music educator may be able to monitor and give feedback from the podium. • Individual student feedback may be provided during whole group performance, small group performance, and individual student performance. • Student provided feedback on learning may be in the form of student questions, student assessment (performance, verbal, or written), or student self-evaluation of learning.
Grouping Students	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students having a role in the group, with the teacher or classmates ensuring that the expectations for each role are met. • Scripting notes that capture the composition of the groups (group arrangements may vary) and how the teacher ensures students are successful in their group. • How students engage with one another during the lesson to 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of the group arrangement should occur in a conference with the teacher to ensure the groups are intentional. • The teacher may define roles and responsibilities through the assigning of voice types and instrument parts (ex. Soprano, Alto, Tenor; Trumpet 1, Trumpet 2; Woodwinds, Strings, Brass, and Percussion).

	<p>meet the goal of the day's activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How students are grouped for the lesson and whether the group composition provides the necessary support for mastering the skill. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers often simultaneously assess and address small groups and individual student performance during whole group performance. During whole group performance, students are often simultaneously working in smaller groups as assigned by the teacher (see above examples).
Teacher Content Knowledge	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How the teacher exhibits accurate knowledge of musical terms, such as bowings and fingerings, sticking, vocal parts and ranges, and performance techniques. The various instructional strategies the teacher uses during the lesson. How the teacher and students make connections to past learning and/or previously introduced concepts. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluators may need the educator to provide an overview of musical terms used in the lesson if the evaluator is unsure of accuracy. Various teaching strategies used during the lesson should be discussed during the pre or post conference.
Teacher Knowledge of Students	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How the teacher exhibits knowledge of students by assigning musical parts and selecting music appropriate for their experience and ability levels, as well as incorporating teaching techniques that address learning difficulties (such as strategic student 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider that differentiation is not only a matter of addressing skill level or learning style, but also a matter of addressing the needs of students based on instrument or voice type.

	<p>placement, visual cues, and strategic part assignments), student interests, and cultural heritage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of scaffolding or supports for students who may have difficulty completing assigned tasks during the lesson. • Differentiation of instruction and student work to meet the various learning levels of the students. 	
Thinking	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How frequently the teacher provides opportunities for students to think during the lesson. • The types of thinking the teacher models for students and how effectively students are given experiences to apply those thinking types through discussion, performance, and/or group work. • How the teacher monitors students' thinking to ensure they understand what they are learning and are aware of the thinking strategies they are using and why. • Opportunities provided for students to apply their thinking and successfully assess their progress and areas for improvement. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analytical Thinking in music may require students to identify structures such as form, key, or motifs; analyze melody, harmony, rhythm, or timbre; or recognize meaning in music. • Practical Thinking in music may require students to plan a performance, logistic arrangements for equipment, or select music for a performance. • Creative Thinking in music may mean improvising, revising, composing, or performing. • Research-Based Thinking in music may mean researching careers, composers, instruments, vocalists, or individual pieces of music and presenting those findings orally or in written form. • Opportunities to respond could include performed communication of ideas.

<p>Problem Solving</p>	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the teacher provides students with opportunities to engage in problem solving during lesson activities. • The types of problem solving students are engaged in throughout the lesson or activities. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <p>During individual and ensemble activities, music students could show evidence of problem solving in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstraction in a music class may require students to break down musical forms or concepts, identify underlying patterns, or identify conceptual representation. • Categorization in a music class may look like students classifying instrument groups, voice types, expressive styles, or genres. • Drawing Conclusions/Justifying Solutions in a music class could include students providing feedback for live or recorded music, students making decisions related to rehearsal techniques, or students expressing rationale behind compositional or improvisational decisions. • Predicting Outcomes in a music class could look like students expressing their consideration of the impact of musical parameters on an audience. It could also be evident in the result of a practice technique. • Observing and experimenting in a music class could be found in evidence of students listening to the surrounding ensemble or a recording and
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		<p>adjusting performance to achieve different outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving solutions in a music class could be evident in student revisions to composed or improvised music, adjustments to rehearsal techniques, or alterations to stylistic interpretation. Identifying relevant/irrelevant information in a music class could look like students describing how performance parameters or rehearsal techniques either do or do not impact a finished product. Generating Ideas in a music class may be evident in students developing processes for refinement of rehearsal or performance, or the creation of new musical ideas. Creating and designing in a music class could be evident when students select performance literature or venue, design performance set up, design advertising methods, or compose/improvise new musical works.
Environment Rubric		
Indicator	Possible Evidence	Considerations
Expectations	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How the teacher communicates expectations for student work, including thinking and problem solving aligned to the standard. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic and behavioral expectations will appear differently in ensemble and general music classes based on the expectations of the specific

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students answering questions without fear of making mistakes. The presence of specific academic feedback from the teacher when students' answers are incorrect. Student work and activities that are differentiated based on students' skill levels. The educator modeling expectations for completing student work, with students demonstrating success in meeting those expectations. 	<p>skills being taught. For example, expectations of a Perform standard may look different than the expectations of a Respond standard.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In a single class, students may be working on standards at different skill levels.
Managing Student Behaviors	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How the teacher responds to disruptions in the classroom. Established class procedures for learning and behavior. Evidence of a behavioral plan. Strategies the educator uses to maintain appropriate behavior. How inappropriate behavior is addressed and whether instruction is interrupted as a result. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For large performing ensembles, behavior management is largely a function of the "ensemble culture" where teacher and students have built a set of community expectations. A class behavior plan may not be posted as a set of rules, but instead is observed through teacher/student or student/student interactions. Behavioral procedures might be observed in the ways the educator quiets the room after class discussion or the ways the educator commands attention when transitioning from individual practice to whole group practice. Evidence of behavioral plans may not be apparent during classroom observation, but

		instead evidence can be collected during discussions with the educator during pre-conference or a discussion before the post-conference.
Environment	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the classroom is physically set up. • Students knowing how to access the materials needed to complete tasks. • Students having access to view their own completed tasks as well as the work of other students. • Availability of space for students to work both individually and in groups. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displayed student work may include photos of student performances, recognition of student achievements, instructions for accessing recordings of student performances, or paper-based student work. • Though a class may be arranged as a single large group, there should be subsets within the larger group based on instrument, musical part, or voice type.
Respectful Culture	<p>Observers should seek evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The respectful rapport between the teacher and students as they ask questions and respond to one another. • The educator demonstrating acceptance of student suggestions or opinions within the academic context. • The tone and word choice used by both the educator and students when providing feedback. 	<p>Possible considerations for evidence collection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In large ensembles, there are often layers of student leadership present between students and teachers. The response of students to the student leaders and the educator is a reflection of a respectful culture or lack thereof.

Observer Considerations: Preparing for the Post-Conference

In all classrooms, including music, observers should analyze student work as part of evaluating instructional effectiveness. However, "student work" in a music classroom can look different depending on the type of classroom and the focus of the lesson, whether students are performing, creating, responding, or connecting. Student work in music classrooms may share some elements with general education settings, but it should primarily reflect the Fine Arts Standards. These standards emphasize artistic literacy, including the skills, language, critical and creative thinking, and cultural and historical understanding essential to functioning as a musical artist.

In Perform standards focused lessons, student work might include individual or group performances (live or recorded), vocalizations, or demonstrations of technique. In Create standards focused lessons, student work may involve composition, improvisation, or exploration of sound. In Respond standards focused lessons, it may take the form of written reflections, peer feedback, movement, or verbal discussion about music. In Connect standards focused lessons, student work may include personal or cultural reflections, interdisciplinary projects, or demonstrations of how music relates to students' own lives and experiences. Regardless of its form, student work should align with these standards and the instructional goals of the lesson.

More detailed support for post-conferences, including example questions, identifying reinforcement and refinement areas, and follow-up plans may be found in the [Teacher Evaluation Handbook](#). With additional questions, please contact TEAM.Questions@tn.gov.