

T-TESS: Showcasing What We Do As Music Educators (Part 1 of a 4-part series)

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During the spring semester of 2016, my role as a Fine Arts Coordinator also included assisting at a campus with T-TESS observations. In case you may not be aware, TTESS (Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System) has now replaced the former PDAS (Professional Development and Appraisal System) for the 2016-2017 school year, and there were approximately 200 school districts piloting the program in 2015-2016. You might be thinking what a great idea, have the fine arts coordinator conduct observations on fine arts personnel (that is a great idea) but I was doing observations on classroom teachers. Don't misunderstand me, besides 22 years of band directing; I was also an assistant principal for curriculum and instruction before I took my current position, so I am familiar with conducting classroom observations and walkthroughs and certified in both PDAS and T-TESS. As arduous and intensive as this process was in addition to my assigned responsibilities, I realized how this new evaluation system allows for music educators to substantiate the viability of their programs to administrators. Let's look at this from a different perspective. How many times has your program been assessed by a performance rating at a contest? Though the program may have earned less than a superior rating it has shown considerable improvement and made gains over the course of the year and

previous years yet your program may still be questioned, and compared, by stakeholders. As you know, we work in a data-driven, positivist environment where validity is determined by test scores and results, and not always through conversations and progress measures that demonstrate what we do in the classroom. The T-TESS system will now provide opportunities for music educators to discuss and provide evidence of what it is we are trying to accomplish in the classroom. T-TESS is a process and not an event that occurs one time a year; it is designed for multiple walkthroughs and formal and informal observations throughout the year with a focus on instructional support and feedback. There are four domains with the new evaluation system: Planning, Instruction, Learning Environment and Professional Practices and Responsibilities. Before the evaluation, there are two areas that will be addressed in this article: 1) The self-assessment and goal setting which replaces the teacher self-report in the former PDAS and 2) the pre-conference prior to your formal observation with the appraiser (T-TESS Rubric).

Goal Setting

As the school year begins and you've now concluded the T-TESS training, begin thinking about your instructional goals and developing them using key instructional terms. Part I of the Self-Assessment section is where you focus on goals and

data. The goals pertain to you as a director and forms of assessment and progress measures implemented to determine student understanding and content knowledge. Devise a plan on attaining your improvement goals and include professional development (TBA/TMEA) outside of professional development offered on your campus/district (T-TESS Rubric, 2016). The self-assessment must be submitted to the appraiser within three weeks of the first day of school. In the assessment you will identify the data and processes used to assess students' academic and developmental needs, and the data and processes used to assess your professional growth areas (T-TESS Annual Appraisal Process Timeline). It is important to include your contribution to student learning through multiple measures that demonstrate planning and preparation as well as assessing and gathering data through ratings, retention, progress, and alignment to campus initiatives. This will become beneficial throughout the year for your post and end-of-year conferences (NAFME Teacher Evaluation Position Statement). Local districts may create a template that resembles the following:

Professional Goal #1 (Example from Harlandale ISD C&I)

Goal (What do you want to achieve?) Dimension (What is/are the correlating dimension[s])?

Actions (How will you accomplish the goal?)

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Goal: I will improve my abilities to monitor and adjust instruction through various questioning techniques and levels of cognition and performance, wait time, and instructional feedback is given to students.

Dimension(s): monitor and adjust; achieving expectations, communication; content knowledge and expertise.

Action(s): Collaboration with band director staff, fine arts department and content area teachers to develop and incorporate questions in the lesson reflective of the TEKS and Bloom's Taxonomy. Identifying methods for proficiency and progress levels.

Targeted Completion Date (When do you anticipate your goal will be met?)

Weekly and monthly

Evidence of Goal Attainment (How will you know your goal has been met? How will you know whether or not it has impacted instruction and student achievement?)

Increased ability to effectively monitor and adjust instruction based on student response, performances, and data collected from music pass-off rubrics, unit assessments, individual performances, and content evaluations.

Pre-conference

The pre-conference occurs before your formal observation. The purpose of this conference is for you to share how you develop and plan for your lessons. During this time, your appraiser will ask guiding questions. Utilize this as an opportunity to educate your appraiser about your program, addressing pertinent information about the class and lesson. Provide your appraiser with information regarding the lesson, student learning objectives (SLO), and criteria mostly from Domain I: Planning that may not be directly observable such as how instruction is differentiated and individually assessed before the observation or how the intent of the lesson is for students to demonstrate proficiency and mastery. What are the students to accomplish during the lesson; how will it be determined if objectives have been mastered; and how will it be determined if students understood what was taught? Also, make a correlation between your instructional goals and your campus improvement initiatives. This will show

that your program is in alignment and supports the campus endeavors. If the campus initiative is for students to improve in writing, describe what writing assignments are in place in your program for additional support (concert or listening review and analysis, journal writing/reflections). Provide a sample of student work at your end-of-year conference as an example.

As intensive as the new system is, it is a living document where directors can have a voice and monitor their own goals and growth throughout the year. Administrators will serve as instructional leaders offering support that teachers may need to attain their goals. The process can effectively be utilized to sustain and validate our programs by employing progress measures as tools for student engagement. T-TESS can work in our favor as we begin to familiarize administrators regarding content knowledge in music education. The next segment of this series will focus on planning, instruction and the learning environment (Domains I, II, and III) and their dimensions.

References

- NAFME Teacher Evaluation Position Statement. (2014). Retrieved from National Association for Music Education: http://www.nafme.org/wp-content/files/2014/07/teacher_evaluation.pdf*
- T-TESS Annual Appraisal Process Timeline. (2016, February). Retrieved from Teach for Texas: <https://teachfortexas.org/>*
- T-TESS Rubric. (2016, February). Retrieved from Teach for Texas: <https://teachfortexas.org/>*

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