



for music teachers

Thanks go to TMEA members who offered responses to the following questions. Go to www.tmea.org/q&a to view additional answers to these and other questions or to suggest a question for a future issue.

Q What nontraditional ensembles are offered at your campus and how have they helped with participation in music?

- In previous schools, I started steel drum ensembles and they were popular with students. While this is a percussion ensemble, I encouraged students from other primary instruments as well. I noticed that students in this ensemble had better rhythmic, listening, and performing skills. It was an excellent way all around with music and multicultural education. —*Brent Farmer, Bullard HS*
- Our jazz band that meets on Thursdays has certainly helped improve the reach of music education in our school. Kids are more involved and happy to play more music. They come to the band hall just to play the new jazz music. —*Anonymous*
- While I have not been able to incorporate nontraditional ensembles in class, I encourage students to bring alternate instruments—guitars, mandolins, and others—to the band hall and play together before and after school. I try to offer complete freedom to experiment with musical development during these times. —*Eric Wharton, Mexia HS*
- We started an electric bass club at our school that allowed band, orchestra, and other students to come together to learn a new skill. Our orchestra bass players are excited to have an electric bass skill now. We paired students and transcribed duets for them to perform as interludes between our ensembles during our concerts. —*Anonymous*
- We will be offering contemporary a cappella as a component of our choral programs, and I truly believe it will help strengthen our numbers within three to five years. —*Juliet Snyder, Pottsville HS and MS*
- I would like to start GarageBand 101, teaching students more about music and composing. I would also like to teach alternate ensemble groupings to get them to experience other facets of band music. —*Roxanne Vickers, Warren HS*
- Our Pep Band represents the overall program mostly in the spring and not just at basketball games but for community outreach as well. This affords students the opportunity to keep playing and work on more challenging music. We are a 6–12 campus, and students in the Pep Band can work on a secondary instrument or advance in their abilities by learning from their peers. —*Charles “CZ” Stollon, Robert G. Cole JH/HS*
- We have a jazz band with standard instrumentation that helps students learn fun and more challenging music, with more difficult rhythms and styles. Students in this ensemble are more well-rounded because they are spending twice as much time per day on their instrument in rehearsals, and they tend to practice this difficult music more. —*Chris Pulley, Belton MS*
- I have a weekly afterschool fiddle club where we study fiddle music, jazz, and mariachi. In addition to orchestra students, I often incorporate other students who have guitar experience, as well as band students on trumpet, keyboard, and percussion. Performing at community festivals or campus events creates more opportunities for exposure to our program. —*Angela Harvey, Crownover MS*
- I started a hand chime group after school last year. It is just in its beginning stages, but I expect it to become a standard group. I also have an afterschool guitar class. —*Anonymous*
- In my previous school, we created a cover band from our top jazz band. It opened more performance opportunities with more culturally diverse music. The students bought into this group quickly and it raised the level of excellence in our other

ensembles. It also showed students another way they could continue playing their instruments. We have explored music that we would not otherwise and opened the eyes and ears of our audience members. It's been a joy for me to share some of the music I grew up with, from funk to Tejano to R&B. The cover band has also revealed that some of our students are fantastic vocalists. —*Jesse Espinosa, Klein Forest HS*

- Small ensembles in middle school are a huge way to boost interest and participation. Find a group of kids to form instrument choirs, quartets, or woodwind or brass quintets. I have been amazed at the progress middle schoolers can make when they have their own group. Someone will take charge of rehearsals and it might not be who you predicted! —*Greg Montgomery, College Station MS*
- I created an afterschool ukulele club that became kids teaching kids how to play ukulele. It brought non-band kids into our band family. I also started a music listening club where we would listen to band music and chat about what we heard in between playing a card game called Nertz. The kids loved that and it brought in a diverse range of learners who bonded. It opened communication where previously there was a divide. —*Stephanie McBrayer, McBrayer's Music*
- I have hosted xylophone ensembles successfully. Other ideas are ukuleles, bucket drumming, recorders, and West African and Latin percussion ensembles. —*Larry Shudra, Westwood Elementary*
- Last year, we started an afterschool brass choir program where these musicians have been able to perform literature outside

the typical band class. We also have an instrumental ensemble class that allows students to practice on various solos, etudes, and other literature. —*Trevor Braselton, Dickinson HS Band*

- Our Orff ensemble was a real boon to my overall program in that it showed students, as well as other teachers and community members, what was possible in terms of creativity and performance. Membership in the ensemble required no audition and was open to anyone willing and able to commit to the extra time required to practice. —*Neal Tipton, Retired*
- Our Orff ensemble performs a few times a year. In this group, the students make about 80% of the decisions about the program layout as well as what they will do for movement and body percussion. The students in this group are surprisingly not the most outspoken in class. This gives them the chance to grow as musicians and as people. —*Susanne Zoch, Global Leadership Academy*
- We feature a different genre of music every fall and bring in guest artists. We have done tangos, Klezmer, ragtime, music from the Golden age of Mexican crooners, and jazz improv. —*Moises Llanes, Edinburg North HS*
- Our ensemble is already fairly nontraditional, because while I call it an orchestra, it is actually an eclectic chamber group with guitars, piano, and winds. This year, I even have a saxophone player. Because I am at a small private school, it is important that I include every instrumentalist I can. I recruit students to play with the ensemble even if they are not enrolled because I believe all time spent on their instrument is valuable. —*Katie James, Vanguard College Preparatory School*



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- I offer a modern band class that is student-centered and culturally responsive. The class is popular and has been especially successful with our at-risk student population. It has provided a much needed creative outlet for our most underserved students. —*Alex Ramirez, Pacoima MS*
- Beyond band, choir, and orchestra, we are the only campus in our district that offers guitar and piano instruction at the secondary level. Often the fear of additional music classes is that they will take away students from the more traditional ensembles. However, a number of students participate in both the newer and traditional ensembles. What has helped to offset this fear is an administrative decision to require all sixth grade students to take a music class. While this is only the second year these two programs have been in existence, they have encouraged a wider variety of students to continue to be involved in a music program who otherwise would not have signed up. —*Jorge Torres, Gutierrez MS of Arts & Sciences*

Q How do you include your students in music decision-making?

- For UIL, I go through my process of selecting appropriate marches and works for the other two pieces. Once I've narrowed it down to three sets of pieces, we go through each during the subsequent rehearsals. From that, students vote for their favorites via a Google form. It is usually clear which three the students prefer to work on for the next couple of months, and they tend to work harder on music they like. —*Chris Pulley, Belton MS*
- I have always selected our music, but I find a way to give them a say in how we learn it. What steps are needed to be successful? They also help decide the order of performance. —*Anonymous*
- I often ask student leaders about the pieces I select, fundraisers, our social media presence, and various program logistics. I am not asking for permission, but rather for feedback; they offer valuable and honest thoughts on how they believe students and families will react to my ideas. The students and I feed off each other intellectually—they suggest fun ideas and I choose those ideas that are the most pedagogically sound and financially feasible. I also heavily rely on my student leaders for concert setup. I tell them exactly what I want and inform the other students that their student leaders are in charge. —*Austin Cunningham, KIPP Austin Brave HS*
- Getting the students involved with bowing parts is a great way to develop leadership in the program. In early rehearsals of a new piece, play through a short passage or phrase and give the section leaders of the day time to talk through ideas with their section members and then the other section leaders. They report their ideas to the rest of the orchestra and hopefully arrive at consensus. Director involvement can ensure quality control as well as consistency and the students will have more ownership of the rehearsal process. —*Bingiee Shiu, Memorial HS, Retired*
- While I choose the repertoire, I invite students to help develop the form of pieces, the performance order, and the narration that tells audience members about the pieces and process we used to learn them. Students love taking an active role in their performances and are proud of what they accomplish. —*Jennifer Patterson, Williams Elementary School*
- In our post-concert reflections, we ask what they would like to see or hear in their next performance. Through the repertoire we select for them to play at each performance, we work to balance their wishes with their needs as growing musicians. —*Matt Adamson, Mead MS*
- As students mature musically, I consult them for input on nuance. Regardless of my opinion, I always give dignity to their suggestions. I allow the group to participate in the discussion and remind them that I am a compassionate dictator—ultimately the decision is mine, because the responsibility rests with me, but I will always give consideration to their opinions, individually and collectively. —*Eric Wharton, Mexia HS*
- I am hoping this upcoming school year I will be able to include my students more in this process! Last year, as a first-year teacher, I did all of the selecting and they had to go with it. I don't want to do that again. I won't let them have the final or full say, but I want them to have fun and sing songs that are challenging and enjoyable! —*Caden Snow, Mineral Wells JH*
- We encourage students to explore music vendor websites a couple of times a year, and they complete a Google form, providing links to pieces they want to play. We also complete a composition project each year, and students who create wonderful compositions for full band may have their compositions performed by their peers in a class or concert setting! —*Katie Lewis, Maus MS*
- We always ask the ensemble questions for feedback. We encourage them to find answers for themselves and their peers. We try different ways of doing things and vote on which way works best. For example, we try various approaches for phrasing a line (with some guidance) and ask which one works best. Then we mark it in. We do the same for most musical decisions in the piece, including dynamics, balance, and intonation. If the situation allows, we do the same for repertoire selection. —*Crystal Hoisager, Santa Fe MS*
- I determine the main theme of the program (e.g., pirates or camping) and present students more songs than we could fit in. Then I let them decide which ones they want to perform. This creates buy-in that further invests them in their performance. I also give them options for the time between songs (Do you want to tell jokes? Do you want to educate your audience?). The more buy-in you have from students, the more pride they will experience in doing a good job. —*Cara Walkup, Copperfield Elementary School*
- At the beginning of the year I display a poster where the students check off their favorite songs. I begin to notice trends, especially on days when they hang out in my classroom during their recess and want to play those songs over and over. Don't discount their favorite songs! If I can, I find a way to incorporate them on Boomwhackers, xylophones, or whatever instrument we are learning because it will keep them wanting to learn. —*Alison Adkins, Mineola Elementary School*

- At the beginning of the school year, end of the first semester, and end of the year, I distribute a survey to ask students their opinions and feedback (anonymously, if they choose). Those questions include having them express positives and negatives about the class. Then, anytime I act on their feedback, I make it very clear so they know they are being heard. —*Elizabeth Tait, Seven Lakes HS*
- With fourth and fifth graders, I lay out my skeletal plan for the program and let them help decide on which pieces to add instruments or dances. If the program is running too long, I will ask them to recommend a song to remove. For the younger students, I may ask them to help decide a fun movement to add to a song. I sometimes have the class compose an easy ostinato or B section. Students like to make decisions! —*Susanne Zoch, Global Leadership Academy*
- We play for graduation, and seniors get to select the prelude repertoire (about 40 minutes). They choose from their favorites across their four years and any other ideas they might have. They love this and put the list together in the fall! —*Moises Llanes, Edinburg North HS*
- I give students a time frame for submitting suggested orchestra pieces and then I create a ballot from the suggestions I believe the group can prepare. Students vote, and the three selections that get the most votes become their music for the concert. The students love having ownership in what they are playing. —*Jennifer Guffey, Schimelpfenig MS*
- At the end of each school year, one assignment students have is to peruse music websites and identify three new pieces of music that would be appropriate for the groups to sing next year. I include a rubric so they know what to look for in an appropriate piece of choral literature—it can't be just because they like it! Then I give a fall concert choice assignment where students listen to five pieces and choose their top three, identifying which elements drew them to those particular pieces. This is a written assignment on Canvas. Once the assignment closes, usually in a week, I tally the votes for the top three, and those are the pieces we work on. —*Sarah Anderson, Gateway College Preparatory School*
- Students want to be valued and included. Leadership is paramount to student ownership of a program. Students are always in the band hall, so when we have an idea (or one of them does) there is always a sounding board. —*Josh King, Beckville ISD*
- I select appropriate pieces for the season, semester, or contest. We listen to a recording or sightread the music and I take a survey of hands on their interest in each piece. After they have more time to work on them and we're at the point of narrowing our focus, I do another survey of hands. Their interest helps drive the plan for the music. One year I had the leadership team come in after school to help look at scores, listen, and provide input. This was a cool experience for us all. —*Stephanie McBrayer, McBrayer's Music*

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