Assessment That Inspires

A Quick Guide to Assessing Music in TK–5

Our goal isn't perfection. It's progress!

What should music assessment do?

- Make musical learning visible.
- Help teachers plan next steps.
- Recognize individual growth.
- Encourage creativity, confidence, and risk-taking.
- Preserve the joy of making music.

Four areas of musical learning

Artistic process	What students might demonstrate
Creating	Compose rhythms, improvise, experiment, revise ideas (iterate)
Performing	Sing, play instruments, maintain a beat, read rhythms
Responding	Listen carefully, identify changes in tempo, dynamics, or pitch, analyze musical choices
Connecting	Relate music to stories, cultures, experiences, and other subjects

Three types of assessment

- **Diagnostic**: Where are we starting? Try an opening rhythm echo or pitch-matching activity.
- **Formative**: What are we learning? Observe students during games, rehearsals, listening, and composition.
- **Summative**: What have we learned? Gather evidence through a performance, composition, rhythm demonstration, or reflection.

A simple proficiency scale

Level	Description
4 – Extending	Applies the skill independently in a new or more complex situation
3 – Meeting	Demonstrates the expected skill independently
2 – Developing	Demonstrates part of the skill; practice or support helps
1 – Beginning	Demonstrates beginning understanding with modeling and guided practice

This is a suggested scale, not a California-mandated grading system. Use your school's grading expectations.

Make assessment manageable

- Choose one learning target for the lesson.
- Decide what you will listen or look for.
- Observe the whole class during a familiar activity.
- Focus on a small group at a time and rotate students over time.
- Record brief observations and use them to plan next steps.

Quick roster codes: ✓ Demonstrated independently | → Developing | * Follow up

Keep it playful

- **TK–K:** Echo the Animal, Beat Buddies, Musical Statues
- **Grades 1–2:** Rhythm Traffic Lights, Pitch Detective, Show Me the Dynamics
- **Grades 3–4:** Rhythm Challenge Cards, Conduct the Class, Compose-Perform-Revise
- **Grade 5:** Rehearsal Detectives, Record-Reflect-Retry, Student Musical Leaders

Assess the individual and the ensemble

- Individual assessment helps identify personal skills, independence, and next steps.
- Group assessment reveals listening, coordination, collaboration, and ensemble awareness.
- Both provide important evidence of learning.

Feedback that encourages growth

Instead of only saying “Good job,” try:

- “Your rhythm stayed steady through the whole pattern.”
- “You listened to your group and adjusted your timing.”
- “You experimented with an idea and made a thoughtful revision.”
- “What improved today? What will you try next?”

Remember: We don’t need to assess every student on every skill every day. We need meaningful evidence of learning over time.

Notice the growth. Name the progress. Nurture the next step.