

Let Students Decide

This table highlights a shift from traditional teacher-directed instruction to a more student-driven learning environment. By empowering students to make decisions, music teachers cultivate a classroom environment that fosters ownership, engagement, and deeper learning. Start by providing structured choices and guided decision-making, then gradually reducing support as students build confidence and take greater ownership of their learning.

The Decision	Instead of this...	Try this...	Teacher Tips & Scaffolding
Seating Arrangement	Teacher assigns student seating.	Students choose their seating for an activity, song, or class period.	Provide clear expectations for movement and behavior. Try rotating seats periodically to encourage collaboration.
Classroom Instruments	Teacher selects instruments for activities.	Students experiment with and choose instruments, discussing their rationale.	Give guidelines (e.g., “Choose an instrument that fits the mood of the piece”). Allow for structured exploration.
Musical Interpretation	Teacher makes all musical decisions.	Students identify problem passages, offer suggestions, and shape phrases.	Start with guided questions: “Where do we need to refine?” Encourage peer-led sectional work.
Ensemble Warm-ups	Teacher selects and leads warm-ups.	Students choose and lead warm-ups.	Create a bank of warm-ups and let students pick. Rotate leadership to ensure participation.
Lesson/Rehearsal Planning	Teacher plans all lessons and rehearsals.	Students reflect on the lesson/rehearsal and suggest what to do next.	Start by providing a structured reflection form. Allow students to prioritize focus areas for the next class/rehearsal.
Practice Materials	Teacher provides specific practice materials.	Students select practice materials within given parameters.	Offer a variety (e.g., method book, video playlists). Have students justify their choices.
Repertoire	Teacher chooses all the repertoire for class and performances.	Students provide input and select repertoire for class and performances.	Begin by presenting multiple options and discuss artistic/technical factors. Allow students to advocate for their choices.
Assessments	Teacher assigns standardized assessments.	Students choose their assessment format (e.g., video, writing, slides, podcast).	Provide, or work with students to create rubrics to ensure all formats meet learning objectives. Offer exemplars for different formats.
Concert Song Introductions	Teacher introduces all music during the concert.	Students write and present song introductions.	Assign groups to research and prepare short, engaging introductions. Encourage creativity and storytelling.