Terrance Cook-Green is in his 16th year as choral director at Heritage High School. Prior to coming to Heritage, he taught at Memorial Middle School in Conyers, Georgia and Eddy Middle School in Columbus, Georgia. He earned a bachelor's degree in music education and a master's degree in music education/choral conducting from Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia where he studied conducting with Constantina Tsolainou and voice with Earl Coleman and Michelle DeBruyn. Conducting engagements this year include the GMEA District 13 Middle Mixed Honor Chorus and a Carnegie Hall debut conducting Mozart's Missa Brevis in d minor and the world premiere of Johnny Edwards Risen. He has participated in vocal master classes with Dr. Louise Toppin from East Carolina University and Dr. Susan Gray, coach accompanist. He has also served as the choral chair for GMEA District IV, and as Co-organizer of the GMEA District IV Honor Chorus.

1. Looking back on your career, what initially drew you to teaching chorus, and how has that motivation evolved over time?

Three key moments really shaped my path toward becoming a choral educator. The first was in seventh grade, when my choir teacher, Teresa Gray, allowed me to lead the class one day. It was brief, maybe five minutes, while she answered a phone call, but that simple gesture of trust opened my eyes to the joy of guiding others through music. The second moment was in ninth grade during the All-State Chorus concert. It was my first time at All-State, and I really don't know why, but I sat in the theater by myself and listened to every group perform. I still remember the 11th-12th Grade Mixed Chorus started with a song called 'The Splendor Falls' that they sung in the round that was captivating! Little did I know that years later, the conductor of that choir, Constantina Tsolainou, would be my mentor in my master's program! The third moment came in tenth grade during the 9th-10th Grade Mixed All-State Chorus. There was a moment in rehearsal when our conductor, Dr. Granville Oldham, had us sit on the floor in a circle to sing 'The Cloths of Heaven' by Z. Randall Stroope. I distinctly remember that being my "aha" moment that choral music was something I wanted to dedicate my life to.

Over time, that motivation has evolved. What began as excitement for the music itself has grown into a deep appreciation for the human connections and personal growth that choral singing fosters. I now find the greatest fulfillment in helping students discover their own voices, both literally and figuratively, and watching them grow in confidence and artistry.

2. From your perspective, what are some of the most persistent challenges facing high school music educators today, and how have you learned to address them effectively over the years?

One of the biggest challenges facing high school music educators today is maintaining relevance in an increasingly competitive public education system. Students have so many options available to them academically, socially, and creatively that music programs must work harder than ever to show their value. Over the years, I've learned that staying relevant means being responsive to

students' interests while maintaining high artistic and educational standards. I try to create a classroom environment that my students feel connected to. More than ever, I try to give my students opportunities to have an active voice in the choir program. When students see what they do in choir matters within and beyond the classroom, whether through performances, community engagement, or personal development, they are more likely to commit fully.

3. Reflecting on your teaching career, is there a particular piece, project, or lesson that stands out as especially meaningful or impactful?
I've always considered myself a process-oriented teacher. While performances and achievements are certainly meaningful, my greatest joys come from witnessing the personal growth of my students. One of the most powerful moments for me is seeing a quiet or hesitant student find their voice, both literally and emotionally, through the choral experience. Watching that transformation reminds me why I do this work. Those moments reaffirm that choral music isn't just about sound; it's about helping people connect with themselves and others in profound ways.

4. For music education students preparing to enter the workforce, what practical advice would you offer about finding and securing their first teaching position?
My advice is to think beyond simply finding the "perfect" job and focus instead on building longevity and purpose wherever you begin. Very few educators step right into their dream position. More often, we grow into it. I believe the most successful teachers are the ones who learn how to make their position into what they envision by investing in their students, building relationships, and contributing to the school culture. It's important to set clear goals for what kind of teacher you want to be and what you want your program to become, but remain flexible about how you get there. Sometimes the right opportunity won't look ideal at first, but with time, commitment, and creativity, you can shape that position into something deeply rewarding. Longevity allows you to see the long-term results of your work, to watch a program grow, traditions take root, and students flourish under your leadership.

5. Who were the major influences or mentors in your journey to becoming a music teacher?
This could easily turn into a shout-out list because so many people have shaped my journey. One of my primary motivations as a teacher is to provide as many opportunities to my students as I can. That's 100% because my middle school choir teacher, Teresa Gray, and my high school choir teacher, Charles Nelson, gave me countless opportunities that set me on the path toward becoming a choral director.

In college, my choir directors, Dr. Michael Marcades and Constantina Tsoulinou, along with my voice teacher, Earl Coleman, and my music education professor, Dr. Debbie Jacobs, each played significant roles in shaping the teacher I am today. They taught me about musicianship and artistry, but more importantly, about humanity. In very different ways, each of them modeled how to be firm yet compassionate, how to expect excellence while showing deep care for

students. Over the years, I've come to understand that the better I become at treating people with that same balance of empathy and high expectation, the better I become as an educator.

6. Over your time teaching chorus, what vocal warm-ups, rehearsal strategies, or classroom management techniques have proven most effective?

I firmly believe that effective classroom management is the foundation of good teaching. Without a positive and structured environment, even the best musical plans can fall flat. My approach isn't rigid, but it is clear. I teach (and reteach) the expectations regarding timeliness, participation, and respect from day one. I've found that when everyone is present and genuinely trying their best, we can teach, learn, and solve almost any problem that arises.

7. Do you have a favorite choral work to conduct or sing? Who are some of your favorite composers?

My favorite choral work to conduct is *Abendlied* by Josef Rheinberger. I'm a very lyrical conductor by nature, and that piece really sings; it feels almost like a living, breathing organism. As for composers, I don't necessarily have one favorite, but several choral works and ensembles are consistently in my listening rotation: the Bach *Motets* (especially the Monteverdi Choir's interpretation), Verdi's *Requiem* (the Gergiev recording with Renée Fleming is breathtaking), Mendelssohn's *Elijah* (the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's recording is excellent), and Brahms's *Liebeslieder Waltzes* (Robert Shaw's ASO recording). I also love anything conducted by Harry Christophers and The Sixteen, Voces8, and Voctave.