Liberty University

Competing With Small Town Football: The Challenges of Teaching High School Band in Rural America

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the School of Music
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Doctor of Music Education

by
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Abstract

This project explored the many challenges band directors face while teaching in the rural United States. Despite the abundance of articles about recruiting for high school band programs, few have addressed high schools in the rural United States. The untold perspectives of novice and experienced band directors matter because it is a topic not addressed in undergraduate studies. This study highlights the perspectives of band directors and scholars who have firsthand experience building band programs in rural counties. Guided by scholarly journal articles, personal interviews, and other research, this qualitative research study identified perspectives that have not yet been explored and documented concerning the lives of rural teaching high school band directors who know firsthand the struggles with recruiting. Perspectives on competing with sports, low-income demographics, and class scheduling conflicts emerged as themes by exploring a small body of existing literature and personal interviews. Much of the United States is considered rural, and this study could benefit many high school band directors, seasoned and new alike. This project serves as an example of improving recruiting and hopefully encouraging band directors who know the challenges found therein all too well. Band directors, administrators, stakeholders, and researchers will hopefully apply this research method to build their programs, relieve their stress, and better serve their community through the potential growth of their programs.

Keywords: Recruiting, retention, music education, rural

Acknowledgments

I have been blessed to have so many profound influences in my life over the years. I first need to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is through Him that all things are possible.

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Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Band directors teaching instrumental music experience extraordinary challenges, particularly in rural counties. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), about one-third of the approximately 100,000 public schools in the United States in 2010–11 were in rural areas (32,000). Schools in rural areas outnumbered schools found in the suburbs (27,000), cities (26,000), and towns (14,000). However, the NCES found fewer students enrolled in public schools in rural areas than in suburbs and cities. Thus, many teachers entering the profession begin their careers teaching in rural areas. Teacher training programs do not adequately prepare preservice teachers for what they are about to enter, resulting in highly frustrated teachers and high turnover rates of band directors. Daniel Isbell stated, "There is a substantial lack of literature to help teachers who choose to work in rural schools."[1] These new teachers discover that most rural schools usually provide primary music education for their students, but the band programs do not compare to the large, suburban high school programs where they grew up. Roseanne K. Rosenthall elaborated, "college graduates of music education programs often expect to be able to work in a school that resembles their high school experience or at least be in a position to build such a program."[2] Educators from urban areas may struggle to adapt to rural arts programs, where they soon discover they must run the fine arts department to include lighting and sound. Even teachers in these communities struggle to find professional development courses due to the unique challenges of time, location, and distance, whereas

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[1] Daniel Isbell, "Music Education in Rural Areas: A Few Keys to Success," *Music Educators Journal* 92, no. 2 (2005): 30. https://doi.org/10.2307/3400194.

[2] Roseanne K. Rosenthal, "Teaching Band in Illinois," *Journal of Band Research* 44, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 46.

suburban or urban teachers can find multiple sources. Students in these areas are consequently denied similar resources from local outreach programs sponsored by the local orchestra or even as simple as private lessons. Catherine Hunt wrote, “In rural districts, lack of resources, such as no music store and few if any, private teachers, was a consideration.”[3]

This study adds to the limited body of literature and provides much-needed information about rural music educators' environments by bringing awareness to this subject. High school band directors often work much harder than expected to build and maintain their programs due to obstacles beyond their control. Shawn C. Batten informed, “Band directors must also deal with the issue of building a reputation of the program that will be accepted by the school’s student body, administrators, and community.”[4] Among these obstacles are low student enrollment, lack of funding, and limited time in the academic schedule for music courses.

Competing for Student Participants

Many rural schools have small student populations of 300–500 students or less. Stanley Norman Harris III insisted, “Prominent urban-suburban music groups have a greater pool of participants to recruit. However, rural areas are less likely to have music ensemble opportunities because of significantly lower population density.”[5] Administrators want to offer as many curricular courses as possible in addition to extracurricular activities to remain competitive with

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[3] Catherine Hunt, "Perspectives on Rural and Urban Music Teaching: Developing Contextual Awareness in Music Education," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 18, no. 2 (2009): 41. https://doi.org/10.1177/1057083708327613.

[4] Shawn C. Batten, "The Success of Instrumental Music Programs in Public Schools in Rural Communities: A Guide in Organization and Instruction for the Development of Successful Student Musicians" (Master’s Thesis, Longwood University, 2011), 127, Theses & Honors Papers.

[5] Stanley Norman Harris III, "A Study of American Rural Music Educators: The Impact on Community Involvement in Music" (PhD diss., Liberty University, 2021), 1, Doctoral Dissertations and Projects.

more prominent schools. Unfortunately, there are just too few students to go around. Instead, coaches, sponsors, and band directors find themselves competing for students. For instance, when the first chair trumpet player in the wind ensemble is also the football team's star quarterback, this causes much stress on the coaches, band director, and student. Sometimes coaches and directors will collaborate to share the students' time, but eventually, there will be a conflict that the coaches and students will be unable to resolve. Mike Lawson explained, "Zero period band is becoming the norm all over the country."[6]

Coaches and sponsors in small schools often compete for student participants due heavily to the low enrollment of students and pressure from the administration to develop competitive teams. A challenging problem many rural school districts face is a declining student population.[7] Similar to class schedule conflicts, administrators or even parents force students to choose which activities they want to do. However, college and university admission officers are looking to see what an applicant does outside the classroom. According to Brad Yoder, students should get involved in activities because it will look good on their admissions application. He wrote,

> Extracurricular and co-curricular activities are often touted as places where students can learn outside the four walls of the classroom, away from a computer screen. Furthermore, extracurricular team activities like basketball, baseball, football, soccer, softball, and volleyball and co-curricular activities such as band, choir, and drama require students to utilize the social and emotional skills sought in the 21st-century work environment.[8]

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[6] Mike Lawson, "Can an 'Extreme' Rural High School Band Program be Successful?" *School Band & Orchestra*, July 14, 2017, https://sbomagazine.com/can-an-extreme-rural-high-school-band-program-be-successful/.

[7] John L. Benham, *Music Advocacy: Moving From Survival to Vision* (Chicago, Illinois: GIA Publishings, 2016), 164.

[8] Bradley Yoder, "Instructor Perceptions of Extracurricular and Co-Curricular Activities on Developing 21st Century Soft Skills in Students" (PhD diss., Southwest Baptist University, 2019), 6, ProQuest Dissertations & Thesus Global.

The most important consideration is that there are no right or wrong activities. Several factors influence a student's choice of electives, the two most important being interest and time availability. Concerning interest, students should get involved in activities in which they have a genuine interest.

Forcing students to choose, however, causes other issues. Band directors often struggle to create a well-rounded and balanced ensemble. This struggle creates frustration for the band director, who may begin to doubt their teaching and conducting abilities when they fail to produce an ideal product. However, Vincent C. Bates explained:

> Rural teachers fall short at achieving the large balanced ensemble; some schools are so small that it is literally impossible. This can negatively affect a teacher's performing musician/conductor identity leading to disillusionment and an eventual change in position or career. However, the picture need not be as bleak as it sounds; rural teachers can and do develop alternative identities to sustain them in the unique challenges (and possibilities) associated with teaching in small rural schools.[9]

Funding and Economically Disadvantaged Students

According to Batten, one of the most significant issues in music education is an incredible lack of funding and support difference between rural and suburban schools and rural and underserved communities. Batten wrote, "Not all rural areas are disadvantaged, but traits often overlap, such as socioeconomic factors, lack of self-respect, and a lack of parent interest. These factors may cause the job of a band director to be more than eight hours a day. A director must remain objective to achieve success."[10]

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[9] Vincent C Bates, "Preparing Rural Music Teachers: Reflecting on Shared Visions," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 20, no. 2 (April 2011): 6, https://doi.org/10.1177/1057083710377722.

[10] Batten, "The Success of Instrumental Music Programs," 127.

Due to the often low economic status of students living in rural counties, the students struggle to afford an instrument. Rural schools often fall under Title I status, meaning that children from low-income families make up at least 40 percent of enrollment. Title I schools can use funds to operate schoolwide programs that serve all children to raise the achievement of the lowest-achieving students. How many students qualify for free or reduced lunch determines a school's economically disadvantaged percentage. Band directors must seek other funding options, such as grants, or use effective fundraising to provide instruments for their students who need assistance.

In addition, what remains unknown is how rural music educators' experiences are similar to or different from their urban and suburban counterparts. Poolos stated, "Many rural and economically disadvantaged schools lack adequate funding and resources to appropriately schedule, equip, and maintain band programs."[11] If administrators, parents, and community members do not recognize the value of music education, the chance of music budget cutbacks is greater. Too often, school administrators, politicians, and parents overlook the importance of music education in child development. Additionally, students in rural areas may not have the means to purchase instruments or pay band dues, causing another issue in recruiting and retention. Letting students use school-owned instruments may be necessary for band directors to grow their programs. However, this is a massive problem if the school cannot afford to purchase school-owned instruments. Community involvement and support are essential to school music programs, especially large performance groups such as band, orchestra, and chorus. Kevin

[11] Frank James Poolos, "Secondary School Band: Student Retention and Director Issues-Challenges and Strategies" (Master's Thesis, Liberty Unversity, 2019), 7, Masters Theses.

Mixon said principals may not always have sufficient funds to support music programs: “The school principal(s) may or may not be able to secure funds for your program, although, in my experience, they can usually provide at least a little help.”[12]

Scheduling Conflicts

Smaller schools, such as those in rural counties, have implemented the four-by-four block schedule. Implementing a block schedule is usually due to the county's lack of funding for teachers. Therefore, the schools offer fewer classes for students to take. Lawson supported this idea: “Small rural schools have fewer class offerings, causing scheduling issues to fit band in, and sharing students with other school activities.”[13]

Rural schools often use a four-by-four block schedule due to the lack of teachers to teach and offer more class choices. However, the block schedule has caused multiple problems with many band programs, such as students may take band for only one semester out of the year, leading to instrumentation issues in the ensemble. Hansen suggested, “Supervisors of districts that are moving to or already implementing block scheduling should monitor the effects carefully and consider offering staff development on effective instructional and management strategies to help prepare teachers effectively.”[14] Also, schools may have to group music and band courses together and cut back the number of music offerings such as chorus or drama. Lastly, block schedules cause absent students to miss even more material due to the extended class time, especially when the ensemble is preparing for a concert. Allen J. Queen, Bob Algozzine, and

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[12] Kevin Mixon, “Building Your Instrumental Music Program in an Urban School,” *Music Educators Journal* 91, no. 3 (2005): 17. https://doi.org/10.2307/3400071

[13] Lawson, "Can an ‘Extreme,’" 28.

[14] Dee Hansen, *Handbook for Music Supervision* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 10.

Martin Eaddy wrote, “On the negative side of using the four-by-four, block teachers found a few problems. For instance, teachers had to redesign their courses over a 90-day period compared to the traditional 180 days. They soon found that although time extended daily, actual class time for the course would actually drop by ten percent or greater.”[15]

The four-by-four block schedule has its advantages and disadvantages. For instance, because classes are typically eighty to 100 minutes long, allowing more class time can help build strong student-teacher relationships. Also, teachers see fewer students daily, allowing more time to vary instructional strategies, run labs and group work, and accommodate student needs. Queen, Algozzine, and Eady discovered that some schools had decreased discipline problems because of fewer transitions during the school day and fewer opportunities to cause disruption. They stated, “In the area of discipline problems, slight differences were expressed by the teachers in the three high schools. On the whole, teachers used less than 15% of their time managing discipline problems.”[16]

However, teachers have found a few problems using the four-by-four block schedule. For instance, teachers had to redesign their courses over ninety days compared to the traditional 180 days. Although the four-by-four block schedule extends class time daily, actual class time for the course drops by 10 percent or more. Another negative example is that some teachers needed additional support to implement instructional practices that take advantage of the more extended periods.

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[15] Allen J. Queen, Bob Algozzine, and Martin Eaddy, “Implementing 4x4 Block Scheduling: Pitfalls, Promises, and Provisos,” *The High School Journal* 81, no. 2 (1997): 108.

[16] Queen, Algozzine, and Eaddy, “Implementing 4x4 Block Scheduling,” 110.

Rick Owens reported on a study by Blocher and Miles. In the study, the authors determined that because students can only take four classes a semester or eight classes a year, there is little to no room for taking band each semester for all four years of high school. Owens stated, “The overwhelming majority of directors blame scheduling conflicts for loss of students.”[17] Scheduling conflicts could mean losing the star saxophone player right before district evaluations or losing the drum major in the middle of marching season. Owens later reported that 65 percent of instrumental directors felt their ensembled quality diminished due to block scheduling.[18]

Retention

The struggle of band directors to retain students from middle to high school is another critical issue.[19] William Hayes wrote, “Enrollment decline in band programs during the transition from junior high school to senior high school frustrates many directors of high school band programs.”[20] Schools and band programs need supportive and competent administrators who understand these issues and are willing to work to find solutions. Administrators are more eager to support flourishing band programs that are exciting and student-oriented.[21]

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[17] Rick Owens, "Block Scheduling and the School Music Program,” *Music Education I: Philosophy and History, Boston University*, 2006, 10.

[18] Ibid., 11.

[19] William Fellows Hayes, "Retention of Eighth Grade Band Students during the Transition of High School" (PhD diss., The University of Toledo, 2004), 1, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[20] Ibid., 1.

[21] Stanley F. Michalski, “Components of a Quality Band Program,” *The Clearing House* 55, no. 6 (1982): 265. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.1982.9958242

A high school band program's growth depends on adequate numbers of beginner students enrolling in the middle school band and how many decide to continue at the high school level. Many factors may contribute to increased attrition rates, including students' perceived self-efficacy, views of nonband peer students, and potential scheduling conflicts with academic courses or athletic participation. Of importance are the effects noted due to the loss of student relationships with the middle school band director. Hayes wrote, "A director must seek to know their students. By doing this, the director will be able to adapt their teaching methods to either fit the students' reasons for remaining in band or be able to change the attitude of their students in a way that will change the students' reasons for remaining in band."[22]

If the middle and high school do not share one band director, it is essential for the high school band director to make frequent visits to the middle school and demonstrate that they care about the students' progress. High school band directors should seek to build relationships with students as early as possible. Trey Reely suggested, "if you build your program on solid foundational pillars, not only will they come-they will stay."[23]

When high school graduation requirements are rising and elective credits are decreasing, directors must find new, innovative reasons for students to decide to remain in the band. Jacobi said, "Findings reveal that lack of motivation is why most students decide they want to quit."[24] Parental involvement can also play a considerable role in retaining band students. Band directors

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[22] Hayes, "Retention of Eighth Grade Band Students," 2.

[23] Trey Reely, *Building A Program That Lasts* (Chicago, Illinois: GIA Publishing, 2021), 118.

[24] Bonnie S. Jacobi, "Believing In Each and Every Student: Applying the Lessons of No-Fail Grading in the Public Schools to Independent Music Instruction," *American Music Teacher* 62, no. 6 (2013): 15.

must find ways to engage parents and encourage them to support the band program so their children will want to remain a part of it. Parent programs, such as the booster club, are a great example. This group traditionally meets once a month to discuss chaperoning, fundraising, and other band needs to keep the program functioning as efficiently as possible and alleviate some of the band director's burdens.[25]

Effective recruitment strategies are essential for building and attracting new students into a band program at the high school level.[26] Music teachers must be actively involved in areas outside their classroom to help their recruiting efforts. As students get to know the band director, they will be more comfortable joining the group.[27]

The Positives

Why teach in rural, underserved communities? According to Janet Spring, it is undoubtedly the area's sense of community and family. When the only high school in the county participates in the local Christmas parade, they are overly welcomed and well appreciated no matter the talent level. Janet Spring stated, "I enjoy my rural 'place' with its strong community ties that make me feel safe and valued. The children I teach are my neighbor's children and the children of the parents I once taught. We know most everyone in the area and the history of the

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[25] George Hidinger, "What A Booster Club Can Do," *ERIC* (1976).

[26] Kathleen Marie Light, "Continuing In Band: Marketing to Incoming High School Students" (PhD diss., University of Miami, 2006), 1.

[27] Mixon, "Building Your Instrumental Music Program," 17.

families."[28] Roseanne K. Rosenthal surveyed a group of band directors in Illinois and concluded the following:

> Band directors described their greatest challenge(s) and the most positive attribute(s) of their teaching in their own words. Their descriptions were analyzed and sorted into categories that emerged from the data. Issues related to "limited time and scheduling problems" were mentioned by over one in four band directors..... But the most frequently mentioned positive aspect of teaching mentioned by band directors were comments pertaining to watching children grow or their own passion and love of music and teaching.[29]

By reframing these perceived deficits or issues and turning them into assets—thus more fully honoring geographical and social aspects—band directors can gain valuable allies when developing their programs. In smaller counties, instead of just making the most out of a problematic situation, rural music teachers can build from many natural advantages that are integral parts of rural life and rural teaching. Multiple performances within the community provide occasions for support of shared interests by the school and community of the band program.

Band directors must do their part in this as well. According to Daniel Isbell, administrators may not fund band programs that are not growing or performing well. Isbell stated, "Having the administration's support is vital in a number of situations, including seeking funding, working with parents, and having a voice in the creation of the school's master schedule."[30] Music educators that teach in a Title I school can work on ensuring that administrators include music education in the school's Title I plan. The Every Student Succeeds

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[28] Janet Spring, "Perspectives of a Rural Music Educator: A Narrative Journey through 'Sense of Place,'" *Rural Educator* 34, no. 3 (2013): 11. http://dx.doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v34i3.397

[29] Rosenthal, "Teaching Band in Illinois," 17.

[30] Isbell, "Music Education in Rural Areas," 31.

Act encourages schools to address a well-rounded education while developing schoolwide Title I plans.

Daniel Albert explained that administrators will not fund programs where the band directors fail to demonstrate a passion for their band programs and students. Albert stated, "…. establishing a rapport, fostering positive relationships with students, and showing that one is dedicated to students and the profession helps keep students in instrumental music programs."[31] They will not support a program that has lost the backing of the parents and community. It is up to music educators to gain their support and trust. They can show how much they love what they do and their kids. They must face the challenges of teaching. If music educators are to win over the community, parents, administrators, and most of all, future students, they should always be at the top of their game.

The information gathered in this study informs the education field about the specialized skill sets used in teaching music in a rural setting. Rural schools must investigate the unique challenges band directors endure every day. Bates stated, "Teaching in a rural school, rather than being a temporary or starter job, can be and ought to be viewed as a unique opportunity with substantial professional respect. Rather than try to help teachers do the impossible and out of place, we might prepare them to work within unique situations and settings."[32] In another example, Shaller shared his experience teaching in a rural school: "Growing up in a rural community and attending rural schools allowed me to have experience with music in a rural

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[31] Daniel J. Albert, "Strategies for the Recruitment and Retention of Band Students in Low Socioeconomic School Districts," *Contributions to Music Education* 33, no. 2 (2006): 62.

[32] Bates, "Preparing Rural Music Teachers," 6.

school setting on a firsthand basis and prepared me for some of the challenges that I have met as a high school instrumental music educator."[33]

Problem Statement

Many student activity groups, such as sports and bands, struggle to attract enough members when the student population is limited. Due to low student enrollment, coaches and sponsors compete for student membership instead of working together. With the many different socioeconomic categories and influences in various regions of the United States, there is no one national inclusive plan or budget to help meet the needs of all students.[34] As a result, these areas that struggle economically may be more likely to cut band programs to keep their schools operating on a diminished budget. Due to the severe lack of teachers to cover content areas, small schools must implement the four-by-four block schedule. The four-by-four block schedule prevents the flexibility needed in students' academic schedules to take more electives; unfortunately, they must drop band to complete the necessary graduation requirements. This phenomenological research study sought to discover and evaluate the effect of rural educational settings on music education programs and examined past experiences of music educators teaching in rural communities.

Purpose Statement

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to explore the common challenges of teaching band in rural schools in America by reporting band directors' lived experiences. This

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[33] Jonathan G. Schaller, "The Hometown Band Director: An Autoethnographic Study on the Needs of Rural High School Instrumental Music Educators" (PhD diss., Duquesne University, 2016), 7, ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis Global.

[34] Harris, "A Study of American Rural Music Educators," 9.

study described conflicts between coaches and club sponsors regarding student recruitment when districts implemented a four-by-four block design. The research examined special considerations in scheduling, professional responsibilities, and budgeting.

Research Questions

The research questions emerged from the problem and purpose statements. The phenomenological qualitative research for this study relied on the following research questions:

Research Question One: How do high school band directors in the rural United States face challenges regarding recruitment?

Research Question Two: How do high school band directors in the rural United States face challenges regarding retention?

Theoretical Framework

Competing for student participation, a severe lack of funding and scheduling conflicts encompass the conceptual framework of this study. These nonmusical factors directly contribute to the rural band director's inability to grow and retain their program. Colleges and universities fail to prepare their students for handling these situations.[35] Band directors enter the workforce without the tools to correctly diagnose and prepare for future enrollment trends correctly.[36]

Epoché

The researcher removed his personal experience to avoid any biases or preconceived ideas. Bracketing was necessary due to the researcher's experience as a band director in a rural

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[35] Light, "Continuing In Band," 2.

[36] Ibid., 2.

high school. Husserl proposed that individuals should approach phenomenological research as "strangers in a new land."[37] Examples of these past experiences and biases were documented in the epoché by bracketing and suspending personal judgment on how respondents are viewed through the intentional process of reduction.[38]

Horizon

The researcher transcribed all interview responses, and each transcript was sent to the respondent for verification. The researcher then looked for significant themes or statements that provided the participants' experiences. The researcher sought to discover different horizons from each participant.[39] The researcher did not attempt to group any common statements at this time. The researcher took statements verbatim from the transcripts, and significant themes were written in the memo of the transcript to refer to later.

Phenomenological Reduction

The researcher performed data reduction by utilizing the memos taken during horizontalization to form descriptions of the participants' most vital points. Creswell described coding as falling into three categories: expected codes, surprising codes, and codes of unusual or conceptual interest.[40] The researcher then grouped similar statements or experiences, and

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[37] Katarzyna Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-by-Step Guide* (Vol. 56, Sage Publications, 2020), 31.

[38] Ibid., 30.

[39] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 91.

[40] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 195.

additional layers were built from statements to create categories of complex analysis.[41] The researcher then used these themes as significant findings, as presented in chapter 4's findings section.[42]

Conceptual Framework

The definition of the term rural is a core concept of this study. Batten defined rural as any community of people considered not metro, urban, or suburban or any nonmetro area with a population of 19,999 or less. A rural area has an exceptionally low population density, and the homes and businesses are spacious and not overcrowded.[43]

Kevin Mixon described an urban area as a city or region surrounding a city where most inhabitants of urban areas have nonagricultural jobs. Most urban schools have a high number of at-risk students.[44] Urban areas contain a high density of human structures such as houses, commercial buildings, highways, and other major roads. Urban areas can refer to towns, cities, and suburbs. For this study, urban and rural band programs were compared to one another to provide similarities and differences.

Vincent Bates wrote, "The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) shows that 18.4% of all students live in rural areas and 11.4% live in towns, with 5% of all students living in places considered remote."[45] The NCES is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing

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[41] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 194.

[42] Ibid., 194.

[43] Batten, "The Success of Instrumental Music Programs," 127.

[44] Mixon, "Building Your Instrumental Music Program," 17.

[45] Bates, "Preparing Rural Music Teachers," 2.

data related to education, and it fulfills a congressional mandate to collect, collate, analyze, and report complete statistics on the condition of education in the United States. The NCES also conducts and publishes reports and specialized analyses of the meaning and significance of such statistics, assists state and local education agencies in improving their statistical systems, and reviews and reports on education activities in foreign countries.

Melody Causby emphasized the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on instrumental music education in rural North Carolina. According to the American Psychological Association, SES is an individual or group's social standing or class. The American Psychological Association measures SES through education, income, and occupation. Causby examined SES and revealed inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege, power, and control. Causby frequently referenced resources, privilege, power, control, demographics, and statistics of human populations. Causby explained, "Rural poverty has been on the rise, and although it is becoming more widespread, the largest concentration of counties with persistent poverty was clustered in the Southern region of the United States."[46]

Four-by-four block is a term describing a class schedule that allows students to take four ninety-minute classes every day and finish a course in one semester instead of an entire school year. In the four-by-four block scheduling approach, students no longer take six subjects during the academic year in fifty-minute periods but four courses during a semester in ninety-minute blocks.[47] Teachers typically teach three courses each semester, giving them an extended block of time to plan for instruction or collaboration each day. A block schedule can support deeper

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[46] Melody C. Causby, "Instrumental Music Education in Rural North Carolina: A Descriptive Study" (PhD diss., The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2019), 4, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[47] Queen, Algozzine, and Eaddy, "Implementing 4x4 Block Scheduling," 108.

learning by allowing a variety of activities to occur during a single class period. Canady and Rettig wrote, “perhaps the most critical and unresolved time allocation issue that schools face is the indisputable fact that some students need more time to learn than others.”[48]

Communication is another concept important to recruiting and retention. Seasoned band directors understand how important it is to reach students, parents, and even administrators. Band directors must constantly inform parents of concerts, performance evaluations, parades, and football game times and places. Also, band directors must be able to reach parents in an emergency. Effective communication requires an open flow of information. Parents should also feel confident they can get information to the band director if they have questions or are unclear about anything. Teachers should initiate contact once they know which students will be in their classrooms for the school year. Contact can occur through an introductory phone call or a letter to the home introducing themselves to the parents and establishing expectations. Thoms wrote, **“**When we become proactive with our communications, pride develops. As the media report our music activities, we find the students, their parents, administrators, other educators, and community beginning to feel a sense of pride.”[49]

Significance of the Study

The results of this study may lead to suggestions to lessen the impact of unique challenges faced by high school band directors in rural communities. This study may also contribute to a limited body of scholarly literature describing rural high school band programs

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[48] Robert Lynn Canady and Michael D. Rettig, "The Power of Innovative Scheduling,” *Educational Leadership* 53, no. 3 (1995): 2–3.

[49] Paul E. Thoms, “Why Market the Music Program?” *Music Educators Journal* 78, no. 5 (1992): 29. https://doi.org/10.2307/3398232

and their unique challenges. Band directors facing challenges in rural teaching settings may find the discussion implications identified in the study's conclusions practical when creating strategies to overcome challenges and allow directors to play significant roles in students' lives.

Delimitations of the Study

This study has potential limitations as well. The researcher specifically chose band directors with rural, low economic teaching experience, excluding those with only urban or suburban teaching experience. Secondly, this study only pertains to public high schools, excluding private schools. Lastly, this study solely focused on the experiences of band directors and did not include other large performance ensembles such as chorus or orchestra.

Definition of Terms

Attrition is a term referring to band students choosing not to continue enrollment.[50] Attrition results when there is a reduction in the number of student participants that occurs when students leave because they quit, graduate, or move, and band directors do not replace those students.

Booster Clubs are designed to assist programs in three dimensions: manpower, finances, and public relations. Manpower is provided on all levels by persons working as chaperones and concession stands at athletic events. Financially, the booster club helps the program with profits

[50] Daryl W. Kinney, "Selected Demographic Variables, School Music Participation, and Achievement Test Scores of Urban Middle School Students," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 56, no. 2 (July 2008): 145–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429408322530

from the concession stands and various fundraisers. Through these efforts, the club has also improved public relations between schools and the community.[51]

Cocurricular are interscholastic activities, programs, and learning experiences that the school funds and complements, in some way, what students are learning in school.[52]

Community describes a group of people recognized as having a connection or relationship within a particular locale and identifies as an autonomous society.[53]

Curricular is a standards-based sequence of planned experiences where students practice and achieve proficiency in content and applied learning skills. Curriculum learning and teaching take place solely in the classroom and are the central guide for all educators regarding what is essential for teaching and learning.[54]

Extracurricular refers to an interscholastic student activity that falls outside the standard school curriculum. Students participate in these activities of their own will.[55]

Recruitment refers to identifying, attracting, interviewing, and selecting new students for the band program.[56] In other words, it involves everything from identifying an instrumental need to filling it.

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[51] Hidinger, "What A Booster Club Can Do."

[52] Yoder, "Instructor Perceptions," 16.

[53] Ibid., 11.

[54] Austin Lee Swack, "Curricular Practices and Instructional Materials in Select Texas Middle School Band Programs" (Master's Thesis, Texas Tech University, 2014), 10, Texas Tech University Libraries.

[55] Ibid., 15.

[56] Mixon, "Building Your Instrumental Music Program," 16–17.

Respondent/Participant refers to music or band educators who contributed to the study for this project.[57]

Retention is holding on to those individuals once they are in the program for their entire high school experience.[58] Kinney described student retention as an ability of a group to prevent students from quitting or leaving, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Increasing student retention directly impacts the band program's performance and success.

Stakeholders are people who have a vested interest in a particular venture.[59]

Chapter Summary

Guided by scholarly journal articles and other research, this phenomenological qualitative research study identified perspectives that have not yet been explored and documented concerning the lives of rural band directors teaching high school bands, who know firsthand the struggles with recruiting. Perspectives on competing with sports teams for student participation, low-income economic status, and class scheduling conflicts emerged as themes through the exploration of a small body of existing literature and the survey of band directors who taught in rural America. Despite these challenges, Isbell offered the following advice: "A rural music teacher's willingness to take risks and try new approaches in organization and pedagogy, even if those changes seem radical at first, will keep the music program fresh and engaging year after year."[60] This approach provided the best option for informing the establishment of just a sample

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[57] Harris, "A Study of American Rural Music Educators," 11.

[58] Kinney, "Selected Demographic Variables," 145–61.

[59] Harris, "A Study of American Rural Music Educators," 11.

[60] Isbell, "Music Education in Rural Areas," 34.

of issues in education, particularly in teaching bands in rural America, and also how the underlying themes have developed to produce the educational structure in place today or that which administrators should put into practice.

To further inform this framework and the underlying themes of the educational structure in rural America, the data gathered provide an informed view of the basis of music education development from the perspective of educational scholars and leaders in the literature. Data analysis helped establish the common themes and ideologies related to the acknowledgment of recruitment and retention issues of rural high school band programs in music education literature and pedagogical practice.

Rural area music teachers must learn to overcome the lack of resources available. Daniel Isbell provided further advice stating, "the presence of one or more of these situations requires a music teacher with immense talents and creativity, not to mention a strong sense of humor. Rather than lamenting these difficult conditions, effective rural music teachers find ways to make small-town life work in their favor."[61]

[61] Isbell, "Music Education in Rural Areas," 34.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review focuses on the literature regarding challenges in recruitment for high school bands, including competing with sports and other school activities for student participants, battling with students' low economic status, and balancing student academic schedules.

The review also focuses on literature about challenges in retention for high school band programs, including high turnover rates of students leaving the school system, the proximity of middle school locations to allow for frequent visits by the high school director, and a lack of family or parental support.

The literature review is divided into five sections that provide an overview of the sources accessed for this dissertation. The first section addresses strategies high school band directors can use to build a successful band program by examining partnerships, curriculum building, relationships including diversity and inclusivity, and networking. The second section seeks opportunities for overcoming band programs in low economic areas through community involvement and encouraging student achievement and the desire to graduate. The third section establishes the effects of community on music education, particularly band programs, through a brief exploration of equality, cultural sensitivity, technology, and pedagogy. The fourth section explores the relationships between urban schools and rural schools. It aims to compare their similarities and how band directors can share similar strategies to have successful programs. Finally, the last section evaluates that even though most teachers, administrators, and parents support the four-by-four block schedule, it can have crippling effects on the retention of high school band students

Building A Program

In his article, Daniel Albert assisted middle and high school band directors with recruiting strategies for their programs. One topic he discussed is inclusivity. Many music educators address this issue head-on by thinking about diverse and inclusive repertoire. Teachers can include a diverse range of perspectives by introducing various authors and historical figures into teaching materials. These historical figures continue to inspire diverse learners and help all students understand and appreciate diversity more. Albert explained, "culturally relevant ensembles, a recruiting technique that may be unique to low socioeconomic settings, should be explored as a means of piquing students' interest to participate in band through music that is already familiar and interesting to them."[62] Membership in the band and other music programs presents many opportunities to understand inclusion as the students interact with the multifaceted environment.

Stanley F. Michalski offered multiple suggestions about building a quality band program. He listed these suggestions as awareness of the uniqueness of the individual performer, a flexible program of performance styles, a reasonable approach to musical undertakings, goals in concurrence with the whole school's academic offering, concern for community needs, desires, and activities, and finally, musical development (individual and organizational). Diversity brings new perspectives into a classroom or music program. Students of different genders, races, and backgrounds bring multiple insights and thoughts into a classroom and enhance classroom discussions and learning opportunities. It can add open-minded and well-rounded views and help students learn more from each other. The director must develop a sensitivity to the needs and

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[62] Albert, "Strategies for the Recruitment," 67.

wishes of the members of their organizations.[63] Teaching students respect and kindness for culturally unique individuals will help them succeed in a career where they will likely interact with those of different races and cultures. "Each band program within a school district is unique in itself. Likewise, each student within the band program is unique according to his musical development, physical and social maturation, academic achievement, personal desires, goals, and purposes. The director must develop a sensitivity to the needs and wishes of the members of their organizations."[64] If the music programs are part of the community, the community will be more apt to support them.

Jonathan Schaller shared his experience as a music teacher in a rural school. He explained that many music majors graduate with the expectation of teaching in one of the suburban schools rather than a rural one. He defended this statement by explaining that 40 percent of his home state of Pennsylvania is rural. Schaller described many other challenges rural band directors face, including high teacher turnover, the classroom environment, a demanding schedule, and low school enrollment. Schaller also hoped to provide potential solutions and strategies for overcoming these issues that can be discussed and shared along with an awareness of the needs of rural music educators, specifically rural instrumental music educators. Schaller explained that there is a foreseen bias towards rural communities: "The word 'rural,' as in rural communities and rural schools, connotes stereotypes and assumptions for many people, even rural citizens, and students, due to their portrayal throughout history. 'Rural' can be seen as synonymous with deprivation and decline. Rural communities are seen as backwoods,

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[63] Michalski, "Components of a Quality Band Program," 263.

[64] Ibid.

backwater, and backward."[65] Schaller also stressed the importance of teaching to the level of the students, even if that means sacrificing the state standard level. He stated, "The formation of music ensembles on the basis of the county level as opposed to the school level allowing students to benefit from a full ensemble."[66]

Curriculum

Curriculum development is crucial to a band program. The selection of band method books plays a vital role in a band program's curriculum. Austin L. Swack wrote a dissertation on curricular practices in select Texas middle school band programs. He discovered through a survey that directors are primarily concerned with the sequence of instructional materials when selecting method books. Most band directors utilized individual handouts of supplemental material, full band literature, and solo literature. Each band director had preferences regarding which beginning material they would teach.

Daniel Isbell is a music education professor at the University of Colorado Boulder. His article offers keys to success in teaching and maintaining a rural high school band program. Isbell discussed the influences music majors had in their life before attending college. As a result, many music education majors enter college with solid musician identities that reflect these influences. Music majors develop occupational identity, and with further study, college music majors can develop an understanding of themselves as teachers and musicians to hopefully build successful band programs. Areas with a smaller population expect to have low student enrollment. However, it does not mean these programs cannot be outstanding and achieve high-

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[65] Shaller, "The Hometown Band Director," 20.

[66] Ibid., 15.

ranking scores at festivals and other contests. Isbell offered suggestions to help overcome this obstacle, such as combining groups, holding joint performances, or creating small chamber ensembles. Most counties will allow middle schoolers to march with the high school marching band to form a bigger group. Along with combining middle school groups, instrumentation rewrites are common and even encouraged because band directors work with a broader spectrum of experiences and abilities.

School, Band, and Orchestra interviewed music educator Robbie Hanchey, a middle and high school band director in Southern Idaho Valley, who detailed his firsthand experience teaching in a small, rural school. Eliahu Sussman asked a great question regarding how Hanchey recruited and built his program and the next steps. He answered, "I want a band for just seventh and eighth-grade students, one that's in the middle between the beginning and advanced bands that we have now."[67] Hanchey continued to give great advice for not just rural teachers but all teachers, regardless of experience. He discussed building relationships with the staff and students and not just staying in their rooms. Hanchey also encouraged volunteering when the administration asks, such as chaperoning or running the clock at sports events. He also learned to overcome student schedule conflicts by allowing students to take online classes.

In his book, *Building a Band Program That Lasts*, Trey Reely examined why students quit the band. He described the struggles he endured from being the middle school band director to the high school. He offered sound advice to band directors on building and maintaining their band program. One suggestion he stressed is building student relationships and he encouraged

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[67] Eliahu Sussman, "Upclose: Robbie Hanchey," *School Band & Orchestra*, July 2014, 21, https://mydigitalpublication.com/publication/?m=27488&i=217932&view=articleBrowser&article_id=1763470&ver=html5

high school band directors to visit their feeder middle schools often. He also emphasized "individualizing," meaning band directors must focus on each student in their program, not just the social ones who like to hang out in the band room. He also encouraged the development of student leaders by allowing them to take ownership of the band program. Band directors should continue to develop student leaders even after marching season and into concert season.

Brad Yoder discussed in his dissertation that administrators are putting too much emphasis on technology to allow these students to be competitive in the job market. Due to this effort, administrators are forcing educators to neglect other essential social and emotional skills. However, educators do not teach these "soft skills" through extracurricular and cocurricular activities, including music and sports. His research focused on the "4C's": communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. Yoder also discussed the great impact extracurricular and cocurricular activities have on academics.

In his book, *Music Advocacy: Moving From Survival to Vision*, John L. Benham supported Yoder's argument regarding the benefits extracurricular and cocurricular activities have on student achievement. This book provides further insight into why students leave high school band programs. Benham put the reasons on the administration and board members for cutting music programs. Benham focused on what it means to advocate for music programs. He also provided suggestions and procedures for saving and building music programs.

William Hayes studied why students wanted to continue in the band from the director's point of view. He explained, "it is these needs that may help directors retain students during critical transitions, such as between junior high school and senior high

school."[68] He also stressed that music educators constantly look for ways to invigorate students to learn. He accomplished this by surveying high school band directors in northwest Ohio and southeast Michigan.

During the past decade, many states, such as Texas, and school districts have added one or more fine arts unit to their high school graduation requirements. This recognition of the importance of the fine arts in the education of all students is desirable. The following authors have supported an idea regarding requiring fine arts credits to graduate from high school.

Some research shows that more students would participate if administrators required fine arts credits for graduation. Charles Hoffer stated, "a third reason why music does not currently involve a majority of the students in America's high schools is the simple fact that it is not required for graduation."[69] He further explained how so few students today ever experience any kind of music experience while attending high school. He said music educators must make some changes and try different approaches to combat attrition rates.

Some schools are implementing a "no-fail" policy in schools. Bonnie Jacobi discussed how administrators are debating this policy in many districts due to the effects of Covid-19. Students lost months of instruction, so teachers must get students back on track. Motivation is a significant concern when students realize they do not have to work to pass. However, music can help provide for students to do well in class. Jacobi stated, "even students who lack motivation crave challenge."[70] To sustain optimal intrinsic motivation, students must have pride in their

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[68] Hayes, "Retention of Eighth Grade Band Students," 1.

[69] Charles R. Hoffer, "A New Frontier," *Music Educators Journal* 75, no. 7 (March 1989): 34. https://doi.org/10.2307/3400309

[70] Jacobi, "Believing In Each and Every Student," 16.

learning experiences and accomplishments. Pride and self-accomplishment can come from a sense of achievement, value, or inherent joy in the act of learning, from external reward systems or praise. Through performances, band directors provide students with opportunities to be successful. Jacobi stressed how music helps shape students into well-rounded individuals.

Graduation rates in band students are often higher than that of the overall student population. Frank James Poolos discussed in his dissertation how student involvement in school band programs can be a positive learning experience because it features both physical activity and multilevel brain function. He further discussed that despite the benefits of enrichment programs such as band, schools offer little funding to support these students. Parents in these areas often cannot afford the expense of purchasing or even renting an instrument, which may be an essential factor leading to student attrition. Successful band programs support positive student achievement and growth in academic and social development; therefore, increased graduation rates could be attained by increasing and retaining band student enrollment. Poolos examined the reasons that lead to attrition: "many factors may contribute to increased attrition rates, including student perceived self-efficacy, views of non-band peer students, and potential scheduling conflicts with academic courses or athletic participation. Of importance are effects noted due to the loss of student relationship with the middle school band director and how this contributes to attrition."[71] Poolos also aimed to identify the characteristics of band programs that contribute to increased effectiveness through utilizing one director for both middle and high school.

[71] Poolos, "Secondary School Band," 9.

Building Community Involvement

Community involvement and support are essential to school music programs, especially large groups such as band, orchestra, and chorus. Parents, band directors, and administrators must collaborate to build quality programs. Parents are the most crucial partner in a child's education, and schools can reap significant benefits by recruiting parental support. These relationships require much work by educators and parents, but the payoff can be well worth it. When parents can get involved, their participation can help schools make the most of existing resources. A community that supports the arts is imperative to ensure the arts programs succeed, especially in smaller districts. Parent involvement continues to challenge school administrators and teachers despite being a required component of many school improvement initiatives. Research shows that successful parent involvement improves student behavior and attendance and positively affects student achievement. "This is not necessarily a reflection of social class, as might be assumed. Regardless of the level of parental education, the parents who attended school functions had children who received slightly higher grades in high school."[72]

In the case of a small school in Ellensburg, Michigan, Andrea VanDeusen wrote, "the longstanding history and tradition of individuals and the music program in the community prompted community investment in the school music program and inspired a strong sense of pride for residents of Ellensburg."[73]

Successful parent involvement is the active, ongoing participation of a parent or guardian in the education of their child. Parent involvement includes attending extracurricular activities

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[72] Sanford M. Dornbusch and Philip L. Ritter, "Parents of High School Students: A Neglected Resource," *Educational Horizons* 66, no. 2 (1988): 76.

[73] VanDeusen, "It Really Comes Down to the Community," 72.

such as sports, concerts, and other performances. However, most students live in a home where both parents are required to work full-time jobs. The conflict creates a significant barrier and allows little time for volunteering. Minnesota Music Educators Association President Cindy Shirk said, "our rural, outstate schools have continued to have strong music programs, despite decreased funding, and I think the reason is because their communities highly value music and do what they can, through booster organizations and parent-teacher associations, to help keep those programs strong."[74]

Shawn C. Batten provided terrific ideas to develop community and parental support for the music program that, as a result, will prevent high numbers of students from quitting. Batten stated, "not all rural areas are disadvantaged, but traits often overlap, such as socioeconomic factors, lack of self-respect, and a lack of parent interest. These factors may cause the job of a band director to be more than eight hours a day. A director must remain objective to achieve success."[75] Batten described the experience of a band director teaching in a rural school. At one point, he surveyed other band directors in the area, revealing several everyday struggles. He concluded that it is best if the director teaches students in rural schools from their middle school years through their high school years.

School, Band, and Orchestra interviewed the Minnesota Music Educators Association President Cindy Shirk to discuss current issues in their state. She explained ways the teachers are combating issues by reducing programs by the administration. She further described how rural

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[74] Mike Lawson, "Minnesota Music Educators Association President Cindy Shirk," *School Band & Orchestra*, August 13, 2010, 12, https://sbomagazine.com/52minnesota-music-educators-association-president-cindy-shirk/.

[75] Batten, "The Success of Instrumental Music Programs," 27.

programs continue to do well due to support from parents and the community. Shirk stated, “Our rural, outstate schools have continued to have strong music programs, despite decreased funding, and I think the reason is that their communities highly value music and do what they can, through booster organizations and parent-teacher associations, to help keep those programs strong.”[76]

Sanford M. Dornbusch is the director of the Stanford Center for the Study of Families, Children, and Youth. Dornbusch wrote about a study by school principals to conclude how much parental involvement affects students’ grades and attendance. He focused less on its impact on school activities and more on the overall influence on the whole student. He also concluded that the data indicated that the lowest family involvement in school programs and processes is among the parents of average students, minority parents, stepfamilies, and single-parent families. Parent involvement continues to challenge school administrators and teachers despite being a required component of many school improvement initiatives. Research shows that successful parent involvement improves student behavior and attendance and positively affects student achievement. “This is not necessarily a reflection of social class, as might be assumed. Regardless of the level of parental education, the parents who attended school functions had children who received slightly higher grades in high school.”[77] Dornbusch and Ritter described successful parental involvement as the active, ongoing participation of a parent or guardian in their child's education. Parental involvement includes attending extracurricular activities such as sports, concerts, and other performances. However, most students live in a home where both

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[76] Lawson, "Minnesota Music Educators,” 14.

[77] Dornbusch and Ritter, “Parents of High School Students,” 76.

parents are required to work full-time jobs, creating a significant barrier and allowing little time for volunteering. Other barriers might include discomfort communicating with school officials due to cultural or language barriers or difficulty with transportation or childcare. School budget cuts and stretched resources may leave teachers, counselors, and administrators less time to create effective systems for family involvement. "It is up to educational theorists, researchers, and administrators to consider ways to bring more parents into the active school community."[78]

In his speech presented at the 1976 American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, George Hidinger discussed the development and effectiveness of the Jefferson High School Booster Club. A highly motivated parent formed the organization, and it has been quite successful. Although this parent formed the booster club to support athletic programs, band directors can use the same strategies to create their successful band booster club. The club has assisted the athletic program in three ways: (a) with manpower, (b) with finances, and (c) in public relations. Manpower has been provided on all levels by persons working as ticket takers and sellers and by persons running concession stands at athletic events. Financially, the club has helped the program with profits from the concession stands and tickets. Through these efforts, the club has also improved public relations between schools and the community.

In his dissertation, Stanley Harris intended to evaluate the positive and negative outcomes that music educators experience while teaching in rural educational settings. Harris sought to discover if broader community involvement can help mitigate resource reductions. Influences such as the No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act have accelerated reductions in music programs. The investigation aimed to recognize the feasibility of rural music educators

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[78] Dornbusch and Ritter, "Parents of High School Students," 77.

leveraging increased support through community involvement to benefit their local music programs and students.

Paul E. Thoms wrote how good marketing and public relations can benefit a school music program enormously. The number one priority is to create a program that sounds good to gain community support. Thoms also explained that effective communication requires a two-way flow of information. Teachers should initiate contact once they know which students will be in their classrooms for the school year. Contact can occur utilizing an introductory phone call or a letter to the home introducing themselves to the parents and establishing expectations. Thoms further described the teacher as the music program's best public relations expert.

In a dissertation by Pohland, he supported Thoms' point regarding the band director being the best public relations expert. He further discussed the expectations of a band director in a rural area. Administrators in rural communities often expect band directors to lead the school band and serve their community. Pohland wrote, "Instrumental music carries an important objective, in that it can develop a unit in each community which shall serve as a vital force in bringing people into a close relationship with the schools. It has in many instances been the connecting link between the basic program of the schools and the securing of adequate support for the entire program."[79] He further investigated the community service role served by band directors in rural communities in Minnesota. He also explained that these expectations often cause conflict between what the band director should do and what they want to do.

[79] Glenn Edward Pohland, "The Community Role of Band Directors in Rural High Schools in Minnesota" (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 1995), 8, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Urban vs. Rural

The difference between urban and rural students is not in terms of intellect but due to their environment, learning ability, availability of infrastructure, skills, and access to different facilities. Some studies show that urban students often earn better grades than those from rural regions due to the rural students lacking resources and limited opportunities. On the other hand, the outstanding performance of urban students is associated with better academic infrastructure and access to a broader range of information available across digital platforms.

Rural students face several other challenges, such as poor road connectivity, power shortages, and poor internet connectivity. D.L. Johnson is from North Monterey County High School in Castroville, CA. He expounded on how recent flooding in California created a moat almost all around the school. He also explained what he feels is the definition of "extreme rural" and defined it as ninety-five to 100 percent of the students must be provided a ride to school, and most of these students live more than two or three miles from school. Few students walk or ride a bicycle to school. Many band directors can relate to this situation. Johnson compared rural and urban band programs. He explained that they are entirely different, and band directors and administrators should treat them as such. Johnson's firsthand experience with his readers is crucial to learning to understand the struggles of rural music teaching. He explained that rural band programs cannot compete with well-funded urban and suburban band programs. They often have more students, more class offerings, and better budgets. Johnson stated, "Large schools have better scheduling, usually more periods or blocks in the day, can call all the before and after school rehearsals they need, and in general, have a greater higher musical quality of overall

participating students (just the stereotyped perception from our point of view).”[80] Johnson encouraged rural band directors to focus their short time and little money on what matters most to the community, whether that be a halftime show, fall concert, or pep band.

Bates argued that not all rural band programs are the same, and band directors and administrators should approach it as such. He explained urbanormativity, the ideologies that privilege metropolitan places and values, which can frame rural music teaching. He offered five suggestions for teachers in rural areas to highlight their programs. Bates shared that rural music programs can ultimately be examples of innovation and eye-opening changes in music education. Bates suggested embracing the small band mentality and aiming to please the community standards. Having high expectations of performances over building student relationships and having a fulfilling career can be detrimental, so music teachers in rural areas should turn their focus toward what matters. Bates explained, “rather than trying to change rural musical tastes and preferences, music teachers might understand and nurture these roots.”[81]

Daryl W. Kinney conducted a study to fit theoretical models of prediction to students’ decisions to enroll and persist in urban middle school band programs using independent variables of academic achievement, SES, family structure, mobility, ethnicity, and gender. Kinney further researched the influence of music education on other academic areas. He made one excellent point and stated that many of the students in the study were already high achievers, so using these data should be done with caution. Regardless, high achievement is what parents and administrators want most, so using these data is a great way to gain their support. Kinney also

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[80] Lawson, "Can an ‘Extreme,’" 28.

[81] Bates, “Preparing Rural Music Teachers,” 8.

discovered that low economic status had little effect on the recruitment and retention of band students. He stated:

> Although SES may be a factor that affects retention of students, it does not necessarily influence students' initial enrollment in instrumental programs. Viewed from a monetary perspective, it is possible that directors initially may be able to provide incentives to defer the costs associated with band programs to financially challenged students. Indeed, like other school districts, the schools investigated in this study could provide specific school-owned instruments to students who could not afford to rent their own.[82]

Kevin Mixon is an instrumental music teacher in Syracuse, New York. He offered advice on developing support for a band program in urban areas. One sound piece of advice is to be sure to publicize all the successful efforts and results of student achievement to change minds in the community and earn their support and the principal's support. He further stated that band directors, administrators, and community members develop quality programs that are not often inherited. They should also design instrumental programs to support students of all other qualities. Even though Mixon wrote exclusively regarding urban schools, he compared many similarities with rural band programs. He discussed how to overcome low economic struggles and support students considered "at-risk." He further explained that music teachers must focus on cultural relevance and not just select classical repertoire to further enhance student retention. Lastly, he stressed the importance of administrative support, which should be a high priority in all band programs.

Janet Spring of the University of Toronto stated that research is scarce in contemporary rural studies in Canada, particularly about education. Discrepancies exist in definitions of rural and rurality. In her study, she explored how one music teacher negotiates her role identity in a

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[82] Kinney, "Selected Demographic Variables," 345.

rural setting through the lived experiences of one educator. Teachers must prepare themselves for the idea that they will have to teach outside their primary discipline. Often administrators will expect their band directors to teach chorus, chorus teachers to teach guitar, or orchestra teachers to teach music appreciation. Janet Spring serves as both teacher and librarian for her school and explained that music teachers of all experience levels may find themselves in similar situations. Spring encouraged what she calls a "place-based curriculum" and concluded that it may highlight positive aspects of rural areas, including focusing on teaching themes based on local events, festivals, or other important community events.

Roseanne Rosenthal surveyed band directors teaching in Illinois public schools. They responded to a survey examining their responsibilities and similar trends. Most results were positive, and directors felt they positively influenced their students' lives and enjoyed being a positive influence as they matured as musicians. Rosenthal strongly emphasized that "future research is needed focusing on creative and inventive ways of adapting school band programs within schools that cannot afford a traditional band program."[83] Rosenthal further explained that many college graduates expect to teach band programs like the ones they experienced in high school. Many teachers, especially music teachers, come from large counties or cities with programs containing hundreds of students and unlimited resources. First-year band directors graduate disillusioned by their experiences that their programs will strongly resemble their high school careers when they begin their teaching careers. "College graduates of music education

[83] Rosenthal, "Teaching Band in Illinois," 20.

programs often expect to be able to work in a school that resembles their high school experience, or at least be in a position to build such a program."[84]

Jack Brosette conducted a study to capture an overview of what it was like to be a rural school music educator in 2015 and identified areas for further research on rural school music education. He used a survey consisting of thirty-eight questions requiring either a constructed response or multiple-choice answers to acquire the data sample. He supported the arguments and ideals of Bates and Isbell and discussed how music educators face unique challenges in rural schools. These challenges are low enrollments, poor funding, substandard rehearsal and performance spaces, and geographic and professional isolation. He concluded that the biggest concern is the lack of preparation for rural school teaching. Brosette stated, "the most common responses were that the institutions were not in touch with the realities of today's classroom teaching faculty lacking in practical classroom teaching experience and a need for more emphasis on administrative and professional duties."[85] In rural schools, administrators must provide professional development, teacher observations, and student teaching experience to better prepare teachers for this environment.

The Four-by-Four Block Schedule

Today, budgets continue to grow tighter, and one solution is for administrators to cut classes and teachers by implementing the four-by-four block schedule. However, the four-by-four block schedule is threatening the future of music classes. School systems are also

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[84] Rosenthal, "Teaching Band in Illinois,"17.

[85] Jack Leroy Brossette Jr., "Rural School Music Programs: A Cross-Sectional Study" (Master's Thesis, Tarleton State University, 2015), 1, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

implementing the four-by-four block schedule to compete with the more successful European schools. Some experts have also said that the four-by-four block schedule is less stressful to students because there are fewer classes in a school day and, therefore, fewer class changes. A schedule with one relatively short period after another can create a hectic and rushed environment, leaving little room for students to have good work sessions. Most academic teachers favor the four-by-four block schedule because they benefit from the more useable instructional time each day. Students and teachers lose less time with beginning and ending classes. However, nonacademic teachers are seeing high turnover rates due to the fewer class offerings in a school day, and the constraining schedule forces students to either stay in an elective or take a required class for graduation.

According to authors Allen J. Queen, Bob Algozzine, and Martin Eaddy, implementing the four-by-four block scheduling is becoming a valued mechanism in altering practices in contemporary high schools. Well-crafted schedules facilitate the use of time, space, and other resources; improve school climates; and provide solutions to various problems related to delivering instruction. The four-by-four design is one of the many alternative structures secondary school administrators use for scheduling classes. The positive outcomes discovered were that teachers had more flexibility in classroom instruction and extended planning periods. Students received more excellent course offerings and more time for in-depth studying. However, a few of the adverse effects of four-by-four block scheduling included losing retention from one course level to the next such as Spanish I to Spanish II. Also, teachers required their students to have independent study time, and students who transferred from schools that did not utilize block scheduling struggled to adjust. School administrators offered a limited number of new electives, such as band, drama, and art, and teachers lectured more to fill the ninety minutes

of class time. Limiting the number of electives causes major retention issues for band classes because students can only take four courses per semester. Queen, Algozzine, and Eaddy also mentioned that "teachers strongly supported the concept of continuing with the block scheduling, but they also stated that some modifications may be necessary."[86]

Dee Hansen wrote about many different aspects of becoming a music supervisor or administrator. Hansen supported the argument that block scheduling causes retention issues for arts programs due to the limited number of classes offered. He provided details on legal matters as well as general concerns. Hansen gave sources in all his sections, referring to authors that support his arguments. He reported the findings of a survey of music teachers regarding block scheduling. He stated that 69 percent of music programs saw a decrease in enrollment, and 66 percent found that the decline was related to scheduling conflicts. Sixty-eight percent believed block scheduling has been detrimental to their programs. However, 19 percent reported that they appreciated the extra rehearsal time. Overall, the findings were that block scheduling is unfavorable among instrumental music directors.

Robert Lynn Canady is a professor at the Curry School of Education at the University of West Virginia, and Michael D. Rettig is an assistant professor at the School of Education, College of Education and Psychology, James Madison University. Canady and Rettig offered valuable insight into student scheduling, claiming that student schedules are a practical yet underused resource for school improvement. For example, utilizing fewer class transitions reduces discipline problems and referrals. However, due to the extended class period, if a teacher or administrator sends a student to the office due to behavior, that student will potentially miss

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[86] Queen, Algozzine, and Eaddy, "Implementing 4x4 Block Scheduling," 110.

two days' worth of teaching material. There is also the issue that some students need more time to learn than others. Four-by-four block scheduling is a great way to combat this issue; however, students who are ready to move on are often held back from accelerated learning. Canady and Rettig offered other variations of class scheduling and emphasized that "only in the last decade have educators begun to capitalize on the potential of scheduling to improve schools. With open minds and equal doses of creativity and technical expertise, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students can harness this power."[87] Perhaps there is a solution not yet discovered that will benefit both band directors and academic teachers and allow for all groups to have successful teaching careers.

Rick Owens provided an extensive history of block scheduling in his dissertation. In the study, Owens determined that because students can only take four classes a semester or eight classes a year, there is little to no room for taking band each semester for all four years. He also provided pros and cons with wonderful examples of how block scheduling has been successful or unsuccessful in different programs. He advised all band directors, stating, "If a director finds themselves in a block scheduling model that is not working for their program, they must voice their concerns and attempt to initiate change."[88]

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed reflects that there have been great strides in improving the quality of music education in rural schools. However, there is still a significant inconsistency in this country. Minimal literature details findings from studies regarding music educators being

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[87] Canady and Rettig, "The Power of Innovative Scheduling," 10.

[88] Owens, "Block Scheduling and the School Music Program," 15.

facilitators of such community music opportunities. Experienced rural band directors prioritize creating a program that sounds good to gain community support. Then they are expected to grow their numbers by earning current students', parents', and community members' trust despite competitive factors such as sports, schedule conflicts, and low economic status. Many band directors in rural communities have quickly learned that administrators expected them to lead the school band and become community servers. These expectations often cause conflicts between what they should and want to do. Band directors can serve as music directors and put themselves more in touch with parents and additional community members. Another perk is that rural band directors can recruit directly through the youth ministry or start a community band. However, the literature has exposed that many of these band directors do not know what barriers they can anticipate and what strategies they need to overcome while building educational partnerships.

Music educators are responsible for creating a product regardless of the budget and number of participants. Community support is possible through outstanding public performances, which will please the administration. Knowing the audience and community's culture is vital to gaining support. Parent involvement continues to challenge school administrators and teachers despite being a required component of many school improvement initiatives. Research shows that successful parent involvement improves student behavior and attendance and positively affects student achievement.

A study dedicated to the challenges of rural high school instrumental music teaching was essential for several factors. First, such a study adds to the limited research and literature concerning instrumental music education, especially rural music education, and hopefully assists new college graduates in discovering strategies to overcome the challenges they will face and comfort them in knowing their situations are not necessarily unique. Second, this type of study

helps reiterate the issues already identified and potentially exposes those not in prior studies in rural instrumental music education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the study's research methods, design, and rationale in addition to the researcher's role. The researcher also discusses the research design, participants, setting, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis to address the study's research questions. This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to explore common challenges of teaching bands in rural schools in America by reporting band directors' lived experiences. This research study also explains how band directors constructively find solutions or other ways to manage these conflicts. Lastly, this study shows the conflicts with student schedules when districts implement the four-by-four block program and how a limited student body causes competition between coaches and club sponsors regarding student recruitment. The methodology described in this chapter used the transcendental phenomenological design approach to collect data for this study.

Research Design

This transcendental phenomenological study described the lived experiences that characterize circumstances in rural high school band programs. The study also analyzed details by utilizing various subjects and interview questions to help fully describe the phenomenon. John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell designed the research framework and combined other techniques outlined in *Research by Design* (Fifth edition). Phenomenology describes participants' lived experiences looking for commonalities that emerge based on phenomenon.[89]

The transcendental phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study and provided valuable insight into the lived experience of rural area band directors. The data for this

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[89] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 183.

study, which include the respondents' personal experiences, were organized by bracketing, which helps identify the phenomenon.[90] Although researchers use ethnography to share patterns of a cultural group, it was not appropriate for this study because culture was not the focus.[91]The researcher also considered a case study approach because it details the portrayal of a case or multiple cases, but the researcher wanted to focus on the respondents' lived experiences.[92]

Research Questions

The research questions emerged from the problem and purpose statements. The phenomenological qualitative research for this study relied on the following research questions:

Research Question One: How do high school band directors in the rural United States face challenges regarding recruitment?

Research Question Two: How do high school band directors in the rural United States face challenges regarding retention?

Researcher's Role

The researcher's background significantly relates to the study due to his extensive background in teaching instrumental music education. The researcher has over fifteen years of teaching experience ranging from private schools in the suburbs, and urban students in Atlanta, to the rural outskirts of Georgia, where he has taught for the last eight years. This teaching experience has allowed him to experience firsthand many of the challenges and struggles band directors in rural counties face. Although the researcher recognizes that not all teaching

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[90] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 30.

[91] Ibid., 48.

[92] Ibid.

experiences are the same, this study demonstrated many common themes and can provide valuable insight to new and seasoned teachers.

Due to the researcher's lived experience as a rural county band director, he bracketed his knowledge and circumstances to eliminate bias. The researcher provided answers to the same interview questions asked of each respondent. This allowed the demonstration of an unbiased approach to the study more effectively.

Participants

Respondents were recruited using criterion and purposeful sampling techniques to participate in this study. The respondents had to follow the necessary guidelines while experiencing the common phenomenon. The ten participants must have all taught instrumental music at a public school that was considered rural. Contact information for prospective participants was available via the Georgia Music Educator's Association Membership Directory or from known acquaintances. Participants were both male and female and contributed voluntarily. The aim was to collect data from representatives from the state of Georgia. The researcher selected ten respondents and anonymized participants' identities to provide an inclusive conclusion without bias and a sense of privacy to ensure a more objective response from participants without fear of retaliation from their employers.

Instrumentation

The researcher chose a semistructured interview protocol as the instrument for this study. Katarzyna Peoples described a semistructured interview as having interview questions relevant to the research questions so that crucial aspects of the research study are sure to be covered while

allowing participants to discuss other information that may be relevant to the study.[93] The interview was a series of ten predetermined questions and five initial questions that verified the participants' qualifications for this study. The researcher asked members of the National Association for Music Education and Georgia Music Educator's Association to participate in this study. A total of ten music educators participated in the interview, which consisted of ten questions.

The subjects answered questions centered on their teaching experience. Each participant was screened to ensure they met the phenomenon of teaching instrumental music in a rural high school. The researcher collected data from active and retired music educators through personal interviews, answering a predetermined series of questions that included participants' demographics, educational backgrounds, perceptions of interacting with their administration, and the benefits of community involvement in music programs. The five screening questions were as follows:

1. Are you currently or have you ever been a high school band director?
2. How many years have you/did you teach?
3. How many years have you taught in your current district?
4. How many of those years did you teach in a school considered rural?
5. Was the rural school considered low-economic or Title I?

Next, the interviewer asked the participants about their experiences, which required a constructed response to acquire the data sample. The interview questions were open-ended to stimulate thought on the topic. Those interview questions were as follows:

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[93] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 52.

1. What schedule system did/does your school use (traditional, block, rotating block, etc.)?

2. Discuss the pros/cons of this schedule.

3. Can students take more than one elective or participate in more than one performance group, such as choir or drama, or sports?

4. Discuss how you go/went about recruiting for your band program.

5. What kind of budget did the school provide?

6. Describe your success or failure regarding the retention of band students.

7. Describe how you involve your program with the community or develop community support.

8. Discuss how you recruited parent volunteers or developed a booster program.

9. Discuss some of the issues you faced teaching in a rural school.

10. What advice would you give a new band director entering a teaching position at a school similar to yours?

Questions one through five were designed to screen potential participants and ensure they met the criteria to test the phenomenon. The questions allowed the researcher to gain confidence with the respondents and develop a brief background for each participant. A brief introduction about the research study was given, and the first five questions also set the tone for how the rest of the interview would proceed.

Questions one through eight of the second set of questions were designed around the study's research questions. These questions focused on the respondents' lived experiences, as

opposed to their thoughts and feelings.[94] Question nine was designed to dive further into the phenomenon and find challenges not explored in the study. Question ten, which was open-ended, allowing each participant to further elaborate on the phenomenon and offer advice not explored in the study. Also, question ten was designed to allow respondents to offer insight for future music educators or provide additional support for themes that became evident in other interviews.

Procedures

The procedures section is a clear and detailed step-by-step process for conducting the experiment.[95] The process was to recruit the participants by contacting them personally by text, phone, or email. After receiving their verbal commitment, the researcher emailed a consent form and had each respondent sign and return it via email or U.S. mail. Next, each respondent was scheduled for an interview over the phone or using other virtual means such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Lastly, if necessary, a follow-up interview was scheduled with the participants. The follow-up interview allowed the researcher to clarify confusing statements or gaps in the respondents' answers.[96] The researcher also briefly described the interview settings and recording procedures.

Setting

The research setting took place in a location chosen by each participant, such as their home or workplace. Some participants agreed to phone interviews due to time and location

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[94] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 51.

[95] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 183.

[96] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 63–64.

constraints. Questions and responses that were not communicated over the phone were sent and returned to the researcher via email, then recorded and analyzed.

Recruiting Participants

The researcher contacted the subjects by email or phone, informing them of the purpose and protocol of the research and gaining their consent by sending out consent forms via email to each participant. The participants in this study provided qualitative viewpoints based on their rich experiences that provided information that could help music educators fully understand their teaching contexts. Next, each respondent took part in a thirty-minute interview over the phone or using other virtual means such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. The questions were open-ended to provoke thoughts on the topics presented. A follow-up interview was also scheduled with the participants. The follow-up interview allowed the researcher to clarify confusing statements or gaps in the respondents' answers. The follow-up interviews also took place virtually or over the phone at a convenient time for each respondent. These interviews and the author's personal experience teaching a high school band in a rural county provided essential data and detailed unique experiences and perspectives of band directors teaching in rural counties.

Gathering Data

Lastly, the researcher gathered additional data from scholarly journals, trade journals, magazine articles, newspaper articles, educational materials, and curricula such as books and websites. The collection and examination of this material established a foundation for directing the study toward understanding why high school band directors in rural America struggle with recruiting and retaining band students, highlighting the need for assessing the recruiting and retaining strategies of band directors at the high school level.

Recording Procedures

To provide accurate data analysis, an audio recording was necessary for each interview. Several devices were used for the recording, including the researcher's smartphone or the built-in audio recording system in the virtual programs. Audio recordings aided the coding process, ensured accurate responses were recorded and assisted in synthesizing follow-up questions if necessary.

Data Analysis

The data from the qualitative questions were later entered into a spreadsheet to generate visual representations of data. The researcher transcribed the verbal responses from interviews verbatim, hand-coded the responses, and initially coded pertinent information in each interview for overlapping themes. Creswell and Creswell described coding as expected codes, surprising codes, and codes of unusual or conceptual interest.[97] Credibility was achieved by allowing the respondents to verify the data after they were analyzed. According to Katarzyna Peoples, transcendental phenomenological data analysis includes six steps: read the entire transcript and take out unnecessary language, generate preliminary meaning units, generate final meaning units, synthesize final meaning units into situated narratives under each interview question, synthesize situated narratives in general narratives, and generate a general description.[98]

Epoché Applied

To remove any biases or preconceived ideas, the researcher's personal experience was removed. Husserl proposed that individuals should approach phenomenological research as

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[97] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 195.

[98] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 58.

"strangers in a new land."[99] Examples of these past experiences and biases were documented in the epoché by bracketing and suspending personal judgment on how respondents are viewed through the intentional process of reduction.[100]

Step One: Reading and Deleting Irrelevant Information

Prior to phenomenological reduction, the first step in data analysis was to read the individual transcripts from the interviews in their entirety to discern the participants' complete stories and create memos to facilitate reduction. The researcher allowed the participants to contribute information that helped to understand demographics, education, community involvement, and administrative support by answering five initial questions at the start of the interview. Their responses helped confirm their experience as past or present rural music educators while also providing an opportunity to discover any foundational similarities shared between participants. This step also allowed the researcher to remove any irrelevant information or repetitive statements such as "um," "uh," "well," or "you know."[101]

Step Two: Generate Preliminary Meaning Units

Next, a data reduction process took place through a round of coding that was used to list and group relevant phrases to achieve horizontalization.[102] Preliminary units are generated by allocating data that feature the phenomenon.[103] A broad classification spectrum was started, and

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[99] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 31.

[100] Ibid., 30.

[101] Ibid., 58.

[102] Ibid., 88.

[103] Ibid., 60.

note writing or memoing took place. This process also allowed for an initial code list to be created.

Step Three: Generate Final Meaning Units

After grouping relevant phrases, the researcher used the technique of reduction and elimination by determining the coded phrases that related to four or fewer respondents. The reduction process allowed for a more detailed code list to be created. Data was examined more closely to group similar themes together.

Step Four: Synthesize Final Meaning Units into Situated Narratives

The researcher interpreted the data during this step to develop a thematic representation. Each theme was examined for overlapping or connecting relationships regarding the respondents' experiences. Participant responses were organized thematically through direct quotes from the interview.[104]

Step Five: Synthesize Situated Narratives into General Narratives

Next, the researcher created narratives from the situated narratives to provide a more unifying account and general description of each respondent's narrative. The objective was to organize the data from the situated narratives while highlighting the respondents' experiences.[105] The goal was to discover hidden meaning, the context of that meaning, and the way it was applied.[106]

Step Six: Generate a General Description

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[104] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 58.

[105] Ibid., 61.

[106] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 190–198.

A general description was created in this final step of the analysis, moving away from the respondents' everyday perspectives.[107] The goal was to discuss the implicit themes in all or most of the respondents' experiences.[108] The aim was to find the significant phenomenological themes and categorize them into a comprehensive general description.[109]

Validity and Reliability

When discussing how to address threats to validity and reliability, aligned with trustworthiness, the researcher was realistic about what they could reasonably accomplish in a dissertation as the sole researcher.[110] The researcher intended for trustworthiness to be accomplished through the quality of the study. The researcher also implemented several methods to support validity and reliability, including peer review, researcher bias, and member checking.

Peer Review

After completing the interviews**,** the researcher felt it necessary to meet with neutral colleagues or auditors to review the project and ask questions about the methods, results, and any other emerging conclusions to create accountability and honesty.[111] The auditors were unfamiliar with the study and provided an objective assessment.[112] The colleagued will remain anonymous, and any modifications made due to peer interaction are noted in the results.

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[107] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 62.

[108] Ibid., 61.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid., 68.

[111] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 69.

[112] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 201.

Researcher Bias

Due to the researcher's lived experience as a rural county band director, he bracketed his knowledge and circumstances to eliminate bias. The researcher's background significantly relates to the study due to his extensive background in teaching instrumental music education. By revealing his personal biases, the researcher intended not to allow his experience to overshadow the research and instead sought new avenues in the research to avoid verifying everything that was already believed about the phenomenon at the end of the study.[113]

Member Checking

Through member checking, the researcher allowed the participants to review the interpretations of their experience and agree that the conclusions were credible.[114] The researcher supplied the participants with the interview transcripts to ensure the information was accurate. Any participants who felt the interpretations were inaccurate were granted opportunities to clarify in follow-up interviews.

Ethics

To comply with the guidelines set by Liberty University, the researcher first attained permission to conduct the study through the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix A). The IRB granted permission to conduct the study after the researcher completed the proposal defense, sent the completed IRB application to the researcher's assigned dissertation chair, waited for approval from the dissertation chair to submit the IRB application using Cayuse

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[113] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 69–70.

[114] Ibid., 70.

IRB, and waited for the requested revisions from the IRB. This initial procedure was necessary to ensure that none of the research taking place in the study would violate human rights.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the research methods used for this transcendental phenomenological study about the lived experiences of high school band directors. The methodology centered around two primary research questions. The ten participants were recruited through personal contact, phone calls, or emails, and their names were anonymized to secure their privacy. Procedures were also identified, beginning with IRB approval, recruiting respondents, gathering data, and analyzing the data. To eliminate biases, the researcher implemented Epoché and clearly identified their role in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to describe the experiences of high school band directors who teach or have taught in small, rural schools in the southeastern United States. This information may be shared with university faculty who teach undergraduate music education majors, current high school band directors, and high school administrators to help future music educators. Chapter 3 detailed the procedure and sequence for data collection and analysis, which occurred over fourteen days, and the findings based on the procedure and sequence of data collection are reported in this chapter.

This chapter utilizes pseudonyms instead of actual names for each participant to provide anonymity. Themes emerged and provided answers to this study's research questions. Data analysis produced the following themes: purpose, preparedness, and perseverance.

Each theme answered the following research questions of this transcendental phenomenological study through social meaning and personal significance:

Research Question One: How do high school band directors in the rural United States face challenges regarding recruitment?

Research Question Two: How do high school band directors in the rural United States face challenges regarding retention?

Setting

The research setting took place in a location chosen by each participant, such as their home or workplace. Some participants agreed to phone interviews due to time and location constraints. Questions and responses that were not communicated over the phone were sent and returned to the researcher via email, then recorded and analyzed.

Participant Demographics

Respondents were recruited using criterion and purposeful sampling techniques to participate in this study. The respondents had to follow the necessary guidelines while experiencing the common phenomenon. Each of the ten participants must have taught instrumental music at a public school that was considered rural. Each respondent contributed a unique perspective on the lived experiences of rural high school band directors. Regardless of grammatical errors, all quotes from the participants remain true to their responses given during the interviews. Pseudonyms were assigned in a realistic and culturally relevant manner, utilizing randomly assigned names to protect the participants' confidentiality. Table 1 presents the details of each participant's background.

Table 1. Participant Backgrounds

Participant	Gender	Education	Years Experience
Katie	F	Bachelor's	2
Louie	M	Specialist	12
John	M	Bachelor's	11
Joe	M	Bachelor's	15
Melissa	F	Bachelor's	18
Gigi	F	Master's	17
Jorge	M	Doctorate	17
Dennis	M	Bachelor's	7
Edward	M	Bachelor's	8
Robert	M	Doctorate	26

Katie

Katie is a female band director in her second year of teaching. She is an assistant band director who teaches at different middle and high schools. While attending high school, she came from a large band and has had to learn to adjust to how small schools operate.

Louie

Louie is a male band director who has been teaching for eight years. He provides unique insight into a school that, although considered rural, does not implement the four-by-four block schedule and how flexible classes are because of it. He has taught college classes in addition to teaching high school. He is also required to teach band and chorus at his school.

John

John is a male band director with ten years of teaching experience. He has been to several schools in his experience, two of which were rural schools. He provides valuable advice to future band directors who may face many complex career challenges.

Joe

Joe is a male band director who provides a unique perspective on the struggles of recruiting. He starts from scratch almost every school year, trying to build his program. However, he concluded the interview with great advice for new teachers and explained that they should go “fundraiser crazy.”

Melissa

Melissa is a female band director with eighteen years of teaching experience. She has spent fifteen of those years at the same rural high school and provided some helpful strategies for elementary school outreach programs besides concerts. Due to personal struggles, she has

decided not to return to the profession next school year and expressed her regrets about balancing work and home life.

Gigi

Gigi is a female band director currently working on her specialist degree. She teaches at both the middle and high schools in her county. She has done a fantastic job building a symbiotic relationship with her community and has seen growth in membership in her band program.

Jorge

Jorge is a male band director with seventeen years of teaching experience. He taught briefly at a small college as the director of bands but now teaches high school band. He provides insight on how to be more aware of the demographics in the classroom and pay more attention to being more inclusive, especially to certain races and genders. His school was recently struck by a tornado in which the band room and most instruments were destroyed. He discussed how the community came together to rebuild the school. However, there are still some lingering aftereffects, such as apathy.

Dennis

Dennis is a male band director who has taught at several rural high schools. He provides a unique perspective on internet and transportation issues. He also briefly shared an incident where he had to disband a booster program due to inappropriate use of funds.

Edward

Edward is a male band director who left the profession to pursue a career in real estate investment. Before leaving, he worked in three different school systems, all of which were in rural schools. He successfully built band programs that were suffering in terms of student

participation and then took his programs to receive superior scores at marching band competitions, even winning Best in Class in 2018.

Robert

Robert is a male band director with 26 years of teaching experience. He has attended many universities, one of which was a historically Black college or university, which he attended as a White male. Robert currently holds a doctorate from Auburn University and teaches high school band. He provided valuable advice about teaching band to please the community and parents. He explained that future music educators should enter the profession to be teachers first and not world-renowned conductors.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data from active and retired music educators through personal interviews, answering a predetermined series of questions regarding participants' demographics, educational backgrounds, and the benefits of community involvement in music programs. Each respondent was scheduled for an interview over the phone or using other virtual means such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

Lastly, if necessary, a follow-up interview was scheduled with the participants. The follow-up interview allowed the researcher to clarify confusing statements or gaps in the respondents' answers.[115] Follow-ups mainly were achieved through short emails or text messages.

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[115] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 63–64.

Findings

In the first step of data analysis, the researcher transcribed each audio-recorded interview into typed documents. Upon receipt of each transcription, the researcher read and reread each story for familiarity with the participants' experiences. After the second reading of the transcribed interviews, interview summaries were emailed to each participant requesting that they verify that the researcher had accurately captured their experience. The data from the qualitative questions were later entered into a spreadsheet to generate visual representations of data. The researcher transcribed the verbal responses from interviews verbatim, hand-coded the responses because using coding software in a phenomenological dissertation requires more steps, and initially coded pertinent information in each interview for overlapping themes. During the data analysis process, many similarities and very few differences emerged between the interview participants and the researcher. For example, participants who work in a school system using the four-by-four block schedule expressed concerns that students often are pulled out of band classes to complete other course requirements. However, one difference emerged. Some subjects receive a lucrative budget for their program despite their district's economic troubles. Recognizing and understanding this comparison allowed the researcher to maintain an unbiased data report. Participants' unique experiences, commitment, determination, and perseverance in their stories were also recognized. The researcher's concerns were set aside to ensure active listening to the participants' full experiences.

Due to the researcher's lived experience as a rural county band director, he bracketed his knowledge and circumstances to eliminate bias. The researcher's background significantly relates to the study due to his extensive background in teaching instrumental music education. To

accurately present an unbiased data collection and analysis, the researcher applied epoché and provided answers to the same interview questions (see Appendix F).

Theme Development

It was essential to evaluate each participant's teaching experience to make connections to the emerging themes. The study included nine subjects from various educational backgrounds and levels of teaching experience. All interview responses were transcribed and the researcher sent each transcript to respondents for verification. The researcher then looked for significant themes or statements that provided the participants' experiences and sought to discover different horizons from each participant.[116] The researcher did not attempt to group any common statements at this time. Statements were taken verbatim from the transcripts, and significant themes were written in the memo of the transcript to refer to later.

The researcher performed data reduction by utilizing the memos taken during horizontalization to form descriptions of the participants' most vital points. After phenomenological reduction, the researcher interpreted the data to develop a thematic representation. Each theme was examined for overlapping or connecting relationships regarding the respondents' experiences. Intense manual scrutiny of the documents was the primary avenue for achieving theme progression. This section commences with a discussion of the themes, followed by answers to the research questions using the exact verbiage of participants' quotes obtained during the data collection phase.

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[116] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 91.

A general description was created in this final analysis step, moving away from the respondents' everyday perspectives.[117] The goal was to discuss the implicit themes in all or most of the respondents' experiences.[118] The aim was to discover what themes were present among the lists. The researcher discovered three themes: (a) purpose, (b) preparedness, and (c) perseverance.

Table 2. Themes

Themes	Subthemes
Purpose	Service
	Value
Preparedness	Expectations
	Don't Compare
Perseverance	Isolation
	Sacrifice

Purpose

Band director participants discussed the issue of having enough resources and tools to teach their curriculum effectively. Comments were made that specifically targeted the needs of students' in their band programs. Participants gave responses that informed the researcher that they aim to serve these students in the best possible manner. These statements were vital to

[117] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 61.

[118] Ibid., 62.

discovering the purpose theme. As each teacher participant spoke about their involvement with students in their rural school, words and phrases such as called, calling, passion, and serving students emerged. After extrapolating each form of data, the researcher deduced that these words and phrases could be translated into purpose. Many of the subjects interviewed expressed that they are here for the students first, and everything else is secondary. The following two subthemes also emerged from the purpose theme throughout the interview process: service and value.

Service

A common subtheme that emerged was service. Many participants discussed serving the students as good mentors, role models, and teachers. When asked about attrition issues, Jorge stated, “Because I tracked subgroups, the group of students that I lose is African American females. I don't know why that is. I've created like a little committee trying to help me, but I notice that if I can do a better job of between 9th grade and 10th grade of retaining African American females, it will have a significant impact on the program, and that's a group of students I really wanna do a better job serving” (Interview, November 5, 2022).

Similarly, Gigi feels she needs to cater to students of different cultures and backgrounds. She elaborated, “We lack diversity. I am making efforts to ask students what interests them in band or turns them off from band. I realize band is not for every student, but I want to provide opportunities and create an environment in which every student feels welcome” (Interview, November 2, 2022).

Many band directors expressed that a useful recruitment strategy was to appeal to and serve, middle and even elementary school students. Melissa discussed how she has a contracted day to visit her feeder schools:

> In the spring, I go teach at the middle school, which is one of the most significant things that I do, and then I try to once a week or once a month get to the Intermediate School and the elementary schools, so the first thing starts with me being a connection from our peers to here and I try to present everything as sunshine and daisies and loads of fun. I'm really honest with them about marching band being hot, and hard I don't want to ever catch kids off guard when they, you know don't you know they're nerdy kids. They don't go outside very much. I'm very upfront about that, and that has caused some kids to go and rise to that challenge sort of like the reverse psychology. (Interview, November 5, 2022)

Later in the interview, she discussed how her drumline serves its elementary school by assisting with carpool duties: "We do Georgia Milestone pep rallies at all the elementary schools in the spring. For Halloween, we just did a concert for the whole elementary school at the one next to us and our first town schools. We have had this year our drumline at every elementary school and feeder school one Friday in the season to play for the students as they get out of their cars or off the bus in the mornings" (Interview, November 5, 2022).

Students are not the only recipients of their service. Edward expressed how rural band directors must serve other faculty and staff by modeling caring and respect. He stated, "Take care of your secretaries in the front office. Take care of your guidance counselor. Take extra care of the support staff (janitorial, cafeteria, bus barn, etc.). They will often rescue you when you have no clue how you'll get out of some type of jam" (Interview, November 5, 2022).

When asked about building community support, some participants discussed serving the community through parades and other performances. Joe shared, "Mainly, our community involvement deals with our participation in non-school sponsored parades (Christmas and any other holiday celebrations), as well as any other request from the community" (Interview, November 1, 2022). Gigi stated, "The community has rallied around the band and given us financial support, in addition to continuous support and praise. In return, the band performs or participates in parades and festivals throughout the year. I think every band and community need

to have a symbiotic relationship" (Interview, November 2, 2022). Louie explained how his band program intentionally aims to serve underprivileged groups: "Aside from providing music for the football games, we participate in one or two service projects each year, such as providing gifts to underprivileged students or community members or rebuilding or cleaning public areas. Recently, we met with members of the Kiwanis club to promote our program" (Interview, November 3, 2022).

Value

Value was another theme that emerged from the findings. Value was found in aspects of how participants' band programs add value to the school and community. Jorge offered one example:

> We're also finding that having those partnerships helps us to make good business decisions. For example, we've been able to network better with local realtors. Realtor business donations now make up almost $7000 of our budget and I go back to we add value to realtors. If there's something I can do for their open house market before our football game or at one of our home games announce the halftime show tonight is sponsored by the following legacy sponsors which gets their name out front of six or seven thousand people every single Friday night. (Interview, November 5, 2022)

Gigi mentioned how her band program and community members had built a relationship: "The community has rallied around the band and given us financial support, in addition to continuous support and praise. In return, the band performs or participates in parades and festivals throughout the year. I think every band and community need to have a symbiotic relationship" (Interview, November 2, 2022).

John also expressed how valuable his band program is to the community and how community members and business owners take care of all the school programs:

> Our community was incredibly supportive of their programs because the high school athletics, fine arts, and other programs were the lifeblood of the town. Without these programs, the community would have had no way to turn for help or assistance; in return,

> they were very supportive financially and in spirit. Many companies would offer our programs discounts, help with fundraisers, donate snacks and waters, and donate funds if we performed at events for them. In this small town, the school and the community were very closely involved, and the positive benefits were seen by teachers and students alike. (Interview, November 2, 2022)

Preparedness

Many participants expressed some of their "culture shock" when entering the teaching profession. Each one gave profound advice at the end of each interview. Data analysis suggests that each participant developed a deeper understanding of lived experiences as they gained more experience as band directors. Two subthemes that emerged through the advice were expectations and comparison.

Expectations

Many new teachers are entering the music education profession with a misunderstanding of what to expect once they enter the classroom. Bates stated, "At this level, there ought to be ample focus on recruiting outstanding music teachers with the understanding that great music teachers do not always have the best sounding ensembles."[119]

Robert mentioned, "You are going to have to accept that you probably will not have the newest, shiniest, cutting-edge of everything. You are going to learn to work with what you have in terms of equipment. If you work to build a long-term plan, you should be in good shape" (Interview, November 3, 2022).

Jorge provided insight into the level of preparedness new teachers receive in undergraduate classes: "I think a lot that the colleges are producing more students that have more knowledge in

[119] Bates, "Preparing Rural Music Teachers," 96

music but less knowledge and inspiration and motivation, and your ability to teach is only as good as your ability to inspire students to receive the information" (Interview, November 5, 2022).

Do Not Compare

Band directors, like all humans, tend to compare their successes to others. This is especially apparent when home and visiting bands perform during halftime or at marching band competitions. Comparing band programs happens again in the spring after concert band festivals or other evaluations. Some of the band directors offer sound advice about comparing band programs. They remind band directors that failure is not found in the program's size but in how much pride they have for the group. Robert explained, "Teach the kids you have, not the kids you wish you had. Do you have fifteen kids, not one hundred fifty? Then make sure you write and select music for the group you have. Teach them where they are. Don't lament what you don't have, and don't compare yourself to others" (Interview, November 5, 2022). Joe stated:

> Work with the group you have, not the group you want. It is easy to reach for the stars and push students to do great things, and if students are bought into a program, they will do their best to achieve those goals, whether they are done successfully or mediocre. Ultimately a teacher needs to do what is best for their students to be successful and achieve at a high level. Do not compare yourself to your rival school, do not compare yourself to what the band program was doing ten years ago, as told by older teachers at the school. Do the things that you are uniquely qualified to do that will improve your students' musicality and ensure that they are performing with proper fundamentals, proper knowledge of music and are achieving at a high level. If these things are done, eventually, the success that you want as a teacher will follow, but it takes time, dedication, student buy-in and school support. Until all of these things are under your control, cater all aspects of your program to the students you actually have in front of you, not the students you see them capable of being in the future. (Interview, November 5, 2022)

Gigi shared, "Teach the children. No matter the situation, keep the focus on teaching the children. The rest will fall in line. A good band gets more support than a bad band. Happy

children bring in happier parent support. Teaching and band directing have a lot of ‘other stuff’ that gets in the way. At the end of the day, teach the children” (Interview, November 2, 2022).

Perseverance

The third theme, perseverance, was developed as repeated words and phrases (challenging, challenges, struggles, struggling, flexible, and frustrated) appeared numerous times. Each participant expressed most articulately the effort needed to interact with colleagues. Some lamented how they missed out on watching their kids grow up due to the extra hours required to teach high school band. Two subthemes emerged from the discussions: isolation and sacrifice.

Isolation

The participants all expressed some level of frankness as they described and portrayed as best as they could the difficulty they experienced working in rural high schools. Gigi explained, “There is no one else to collaborate with or share ideas with. No joint concerts are possible without significant driving time. The biggest pedagogical drawback is the time and driving commitment any instructors have to give. I am an hour away from 2 “big” cities. Instructors for concert band are not able to make that drive, and paying instructors includes their fee plus gas money” (Interview, November 2, 2022). Dennis said something similar, stating, “The hardest part of teaching in a rural school for me is feeling isolated. Sometimes it feels like you are on an island, and reaching out to people can be difficult” (Interview, November 5, 2022).

Sacrifice

Jorge did not restrain himself when asked what advice he would give a new band director: “Believe it’s a calling. Go into this because this is your thing. That you’re willing to

sacrifice your family, and you are willing to sacrifice your sanity. That you are willing to sacrifice your time and your freedom, and if you're not willing to make those sacrifices, this is not a viable job opportunity for you and the current situation in which education has found itself" (Interview, November 5, 2022). Melissa also shared the following:

> We've been doing a disservice to band directors everywhere with the expectation that you should work all those hours. Just because you get some frivolous stipend, you should work all those hours just because that's the way the good band directors do it. You should be ok with the treatment of XY and Z because what we do is an art and it matters, and it's important and emotionally engaging. A frind of mine presented at Midwest, and I think the session right before or after his, I think Mallory Thompson did, and somebody said how do you find work-life balance, and she was quoted as having answered, "listen, I don't know if I want to listen to a band in which the director has work-life balance." (Interview, November 5, 2022)

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to answer two central research questions:

Research Question One: How do high school band directors in the rural United States face challenges regarding recruitment?

Research Question Two: How do high school band directors in the rural United States face challenges regarding retention?

The two research questions were answered by obtaining rich data from interviews and follow-up interviews with ten high school band director participants. An in-depth study of the data revealed three major themes that provide insight into the participant's experiences.

Research Question One

How do high school band directors in the rural United States face challenges regarding recruitment? The overall consensus among all the teacher participants was positive, even amidst

the frustration, challenges, and difficulty. Several factors emerged during the interview process. A common reason band directors struggle with recruitment is either schedule conflicts or conflicts with other activities. Louie stated, "Overall, I feel recruiting students into the marching band, and 8th grade band goes pretty well. Students who do not continue band or chorus into 9th grade do so mostly to create time for sports, theatre, or other activities" (Interview, November 3, 2022).

Edward overcame recruitment challenges by working diligently with his middle school feeder program. He stated, "I had a fairly solid relationship with the middle school teacher and would often visit to give the students a chance to see and work with me to build rapport. I would let her know where we are hurting in instrumentation, and she would work to fill those spots" (Interview, November 5, 2022).

John elaborated on his recruitment plan:

> I was in a small rural county in west Georgia, and recruiting was done 100% by my high school band program. We began in the fall by paying a visit to our elementary school and performing a winter concert for the entire school k-5. We would hold the 5th graders last in the program and play a special selection for them and tell them the benefits of being in music in middle school and high school and give them a special card written by a high school band member. (Interview, November 1, 2022)

Katie utilized peer pressure and displayed a sign-up table during parent nights. She stated, "We perform for 5th grade. We set up at open house. I also walk around the hallway or cafeteria talking to students. I also encourage students to invite their friends to join band" (Interview, October 28, 2022).

Research Question Two

How do high school band directors in the rural United States face challenges regarding retention? Challenges in retention that emerged were schedule conflicts, transportation issues,

and student loss of interest. However, Melissa provided a surprising account of student attrition rates due to band class no longer being an "easy A" class. She mentioned:

> So my greatest failure in the retention of band students…. it's kind of like two issues I can think of. The first is we have a culture shock from our feeder programs to mine and that our middle school program and our intermediate programs. At (our feeder middle school), they're only allowed to give 95's for grades in their connections, there we go and at the middle school they're not allowed to fail and also, I don't think they're allowed to fail their academic classes at the middle school either which is a separate but similar problem. (Interview, November 5, 2022)

Robert saw a reduction in numbers due to a new international baccalaureate program interfering with student schedules: "With a new IB program that prevents any juniors from being in class and new course conflicts, we are seeing numbers decline" (Interview, November 3, 2022). Similarly, Joe is seeing retention issues, too, due to scheduling conflicts. He stated, "I retain about 60% of my students throughout their time at the school" (Interview, November 5, 2022). Additionally, Dennis expressed his concern about scheduling conflicts: "We have recently had an issue retaining freshman students because of their lack of a band experience in middle school. It has also been difficult to keep older students because of dual enrollment and CTAE pathway opportunities" (Interview, November 4, 2022). John discovered that though he occasionally lost students to take another class, he often could get them back: "Even at the high school level, the only issues we faced in retention were students periodically taking an agriculture class instead of band; however, 90% of the time, students would be back in band the next semester or attempt to play on the concerts while not being in class" (Interview, November 1, 2022). Robert elaborated the most on this question and found that having after-school rehearsals may alleviate the retention issues; however, it also created other challenges that were not anticipated. He stated,

> Kids sometimes can't be in class at all due to conflicts. I have ten students this year with no band class because a math class they need is only offered during one of my band classes, so it locks them out of band class all year. Rural schools usually have smaller populations, so "singletons" become more of a problem. Kids participate in one semester and not the other, so you have kids show up for band camp who haven't touched a horn in 6 months. You have retention problems because kids are not actively part of the group, and it's easier for them to drift away when not involved. A lot of kids can't focus for 90 minutes, so you must find filler. Due to the schedule problems, my classes are not in any way ability grouped or laid out by instrumentation. One class has twelve Clarinets, and one class has two, and of course, it is two of my weakest who need to be with others. One class has all my trombones, and the other has no low brass at all. So, you are forced to have more out-of-school rehearsals, which leads to dealing with conflicts with other activities, work, family, doctors, church, etc. (Interview, November 5, 2022)

Trustworthiness

When discussing how to address threats to validity and reliability, also known as trustworthiness, the researcher was realistic about what they could reasonably accomplish in a dissertation as the sole researcher.[120] The researcher intended for trustworthiness to be accomplished by establishing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. The researcher also implemented several methods to support validity and reliability, including peer review, researcher bias, and member checking.

Transferability

This study intended to explain many challenges rural band directors face. Peoples stated, "Insights gleaned from the lived experiences of these participants may be similar to insights about other populations with similar experiences."[121] The themes and research findings may offer insight for band directors teaching in inner-city schools. For example, Kevin Mixon is an

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[120] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 68.

[121] Ibid., 83.

instrumental music teacher in Syracuse, New York. He has offered advice on developing support for a band program in urban areas. One sound piece of advice is to be sure to publicize all the successful efforts and results of student achievement to change minds in the community and earn their support and the principal's support. This sound advice applies to rural schools as well. They should also design instrumental programs to support students of all other qualities. Even though Mixon has written exclusively regarding urban schools, he has compared many similarities with rural band programs.

Dependability

To increase dependability, the researcher recorded interviews, transcribed them, and allowed the interviewees to read and edit them for accuracy. Additionally, the researcher utilized peer review. After completing the interviews**,** the researcher felt it necessary to meet with neutral colleagues or auditors to review the project and ask questions about the methods, results of the study, and any other emerging conclusions to create accountability and honesty.[122] The auditors were unfamiliar with the study and provided an objective assessment.[123] The colleagues will remain anonymous, and any modifications made due to peer interaction are noted in the results.

Confirmability

To help reduce researcher bias and increase confirmability, the researcher used the process of reflexivity and also identified personal experiences and prejudgments before the study to allow the researcher to put them aside and listen to the participants openly and without judgment. Reflexivity is a process where the researcher keeps a journal to aid in the

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[122] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 69.

[123] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 201.

identification of research biases and help acknowledge questions or feelings that may arise during the interview process.

Summary

This chapter provided the results derived from the data acquired by the ten participants who shared their experiences as high school band directors in rural schools in the southeastern United States. Descriptions were provided for the individuals who contributed to the study. Next, the researcher described the two themes and multiple subthemes that emerged from the data. The themes that emerged included: (a) purpose, (b) preparedness, and (c) perseverance. Participants' experiences were shared through textural and structural descriptions. Individual stories that provided composite participant descriptions were presented. After describing the themes, narrative answers were provided to each research question using these themes and participants' quotations to support their responses to the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of the final chapter is to present a summary of the study, purpose, and procedures. The findings are discussed and related to prior research. Further, limitations of the study are stated to help guide future research. This chapter summarizes the research findings and discusses them as they relate to the literature review presented in chapter 2. The chapter concludes with the implications this study may have for rural high school band directors. A thesis summary is provided for further clarification.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the experiences that high school teachers have while educating students in rural school districts. The current body of literature describes various challenges these band directors face, and it was discovered that the available research corroborated the research findings. However, very few studies about rural high school band directors were available at the time of this study's conception. Thus, the reviewed literature provided little insight into the study's possible outcomes.

Multiple common themes identified from the existing literature were related to the research findings. For example, several authors stated that nonacademic teachers are seeing high turnover rates due to the fewer class offerings in a school day, and the constraining schedule forces students to either stay in an elective or take a required class for graduation. Nearly all the participants in the study said something similar. They are losing students due to the demands of Career Technical and Agricultural Education, dual enrollment, and advanced placement classes. Robert discussed the constraints four-by-four block scheduling has on his program: "Kids sometimes can't be in class at all due to conflicts. I have ten students this year with no band class

because a math class they need is only offered during one of my band classes, so it locks them out of band class all year. Rural schools usually have smaller populations, so 'singletons' become more of a problem" (Interview, November 5, 2022).

Another example is that with the many different socioeconomic categories and influences in various regions of the United States, there is no national inclusive plan or budget to help meet the needs of all students. Despite this trend, many participants stated they receive no funds from the school district, so the band budget survives on donations, fundraising, student dues, and other similar activities. Much of the literature discussed the inability of most of these students to afford an instrument, but one overlooked challenge was that most students lacked quality internet. John discussed, "We found our largest academic issue to be the lack of home internet and the lack of solid internet connection. In our school, the only internet connection many students had access to was the limited data packages on cell phones, and in many cases, the rural area of their homes did not allow for solid internet service" (Interview, November 2, 2022). Regardless of these struggles, band director participants created positive student relationships. These positive relationships were attributed to the teacher participants' actions to provide an environment that was loving, accepting, accommodating, and celebratory. The research demonstrated that all of the participants were warm and inclusive and that their schools welcomed students with low SES.

Lastly, another common theme was how the participants established a relationship with the community, which helps support music education, particularly band programs, through a brief exploration of equality, cultural sensitivity, and exposure. A community that supports the arts is imperative to ensure the arts programs succeed, especially in smaller districts. The community should be proud of its music programs and what they are doing. Jorge shared how a

tornado struck his school where the band room was and destroyed most of the instruments. He discussed how the community came together to rebuild the school. He accomplished community support through building business partnerships by performing at businesses. He explained, “We started getting out in the community and playing places, and we even have a jazz band that gets out and plays, and then we try to take pictures in front of businesses and post them are Instagram to support them, and I think it's a pretty huge way if there's a way we can add value to our community we try to add value first and seek value second” (Interview, November 5, 2022).

Implications

This study has important implications for rural high schools educating band students. This topic is also pertinent to many stakeholders within the educational environment. Such implications pertain to future and present band directors, parents of students in rural band programs, community members and stakeholders who may be asked to support these students, and school administrators of rural schools. This section discusses the particulars of those implications.

Band Directors

This study indicated that when faced with the challenges of teaching high school band in rural schools, band directors persevere through the many frustrations and struggles during their careers. The sense of purpose in their profession propels them to do what they do each day with love and care. However, their dedication and commitment to teaching band students do not replace the need for proper training. Additionally, although many of these teachers received little to no preparation in undergraduate school, the research indicates that these educators overcome these challenges due to their professionalism and dedication to the students. Although these

things do not negate the need for professional development, they are undoubtedly necessary if their schools are to be considered authentic institutions of learning. Therefore, the implication for teachers is for an immediate overhaul of undergraduate music education-related courses. Also, current band directors can find solutions to similar challenges they face daily by sharing this research. With increased understanding, the potential for greater success and retention of committed and caring music teachers also increases. As community stakeholders and music teachers reflect on the roles of music in their schools, their careful consideration and embrace of contextual issues will ultimately strengthen their commitment to providing meaningful music education for all.

Parents

The findings of this study have shown that rural band directors are competent, educated, and resilient enough to teach students who live in rural areas. Parents can be reassured that these high school band rooms are more than just places of musical instruction but are now becoming legitimate educational institutions providing genuine emotional and behavioral care. Parent involvement continues to challenge school administrators and teachers despite being a required component of many school improvement initiatives. Research shows that successful parent involvement improves student behavior and attendance and positively affects student achievement.

Community Members and Stakeholders

The research has found that both parties can benefit by building symbiotic relationships with local businesses. Band programs should be open to public performances outside of their band hall. Such performances include grand openings, fairs, sales, and outdoor expo events. City officials and politicians can develop an appreciation of a band program when the high school

band participates in the Christmas parade or performs for charity events. A community that supports the arts is imperative to ensure the arts programs succeed, especially in smaller districts. The community should be proud of its music programs and what they are doing.

Administrators

The implication for administrators is the opportunity to open their schools to more music programs. They must listen when rural band directors share their frustrations regarding student scheduling or funding. Administrators push to compete with larger schools in terms of academic offerings, but they overlook the "big picture" and miss out on all the music programs offered in student development.

Outside of musical development, administrators must understand how much music education adds to the development of the "whole child." Band students learn essential life lessons on personal responsibility, cultural sensitivity, and diversity and bring new perspectives into a classroom or music program. Students of different genders, races, and backgrounds bring multiple insights and thoughts into a classroom and enhance classroom discussions and learning opportunities. Student diversity can add open-minded and well-rounded views and help students learn more from each other.

If administrators, parents, and community members do not recognize the value of music education, the chance of music budget cutbacks is greater. Too often, school administrators, politicians, and parents overlook the importance of music education in child development. A couple of the teacher participants addressed what role these students played in highlighting their skills in various parts of the school. Many band students participate in student councils, sports, and other performance groups. Administrators can create experiences for band students and the rest of the school body if they allow more time in their schedules. Supporting band programs

would permit administrators to show that their high school is willing to create an environment that permits full participation in every educational opportunity. Administrators overlook how band students enhanced their student population with their unique gifts and talents, fostering school spirit and community outreach.

Extrapolating on the insights and experiences provided by the ten research participants regarding specific obstacles encountered in teaching band in rural high schools could be transformative for all stakeholders and provide an understanding of their unique perspectives and challenges.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to ten high school band programs in Georgia. Researchers in the future could replicate this study at multiple high schools in various geographic regions across the nation. Additionally, this study did not include any administrators. A study on the importance of band programs merely from an administrator's view and personal experience would also be beneficial.

An additional study derived from the limitations of this study could compare the lived experiences of band directors in rural areas with band directors who teach in urban or suburban schools. Researchers could also extend their investigation to include middle school band programs and compare the similar and different challenges in the programs.

Conclusion

Band directors teaching in rural schools face many unique challenges. A few of those challenges include competing with sports teams for student participation, students' low-income economic status, and class scheduling conflicts. The purpose of this transcendental

phenomenological study was to share the lived experiences of band directors teaching in rural high schools. The results indicate the need for teachers, faculty, administrators, and stakeholders to evaluate these band directors' experiences and understand the challenges they face, and develop a plan to include them in their decision-making or at least consider the consequences those decisions could have, especially when it comes to student schedules and funding allotment. Additional research is necessary to replicate these preliminary findings. However, the findings from this study suggest the importance of understanding the experiences of band directors teaching in rural high schools for administrators and all stakeholders to support and impact these amazing teachers and the future of band directing as a profession for future music educators.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 19, 2022

Christopher Libby
Brian Stiffler

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-1033 Challenges of teaching band in rural America

Dear Christopher Libby, Brian Stiffler,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and

used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER

[Date]

[Recipient]
[Title]
[Company]
[Address 1]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Music at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Music Education. The purpose of my research is to explore common challenges of teaching bands in rural schools in America by reporting the lived experiences of band directors. This study described conflicts between coaches and club sponsors regarding student recruitment when districts implemented a four-by-four block design. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and must have taught instrumental music at a public high school that was considered rural. The aim is to collect data from representatives from the state of Georgia. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a personal interview. The interview will be either over the phone or virtual, and it should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. Follow-up interviews may be necessary, and they will be scheduled at a later date at a time that is convenient for all parties. Follow-up interviews will take approximately 10-15 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please complete the attached screening questions and return them via email at [redacted] or more information and to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Christopher Libby
Doctoral Student, Liberty University
[redacted]

APPENDIX C: SCREENING QUESTIONS

The five screening questions are as follows:

1: Are you currently or have you ever been a high school band director?

2: How many years have you/did you teach?

3. How many years have you taught in your current district?

4: How many of those years did you teach in a school considered rural?

5: Was the rural school considered low-economic or Title I?

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: Challenges of Teaching Band in Rural America
Principal Investigator: Christopher Libby, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years or older and were recruited using criterion and purposeful sampling techniques to participate in this study. Participants must have all taught instrumental music at a public school that was considered rural. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the many challenges that band directors face while teaching in the rural United States. Despite the abundance of articles about recruiting for high school band programs, few have addressed high schools in the rural United States. Perspectives on competing with sports, low-income demographics, and class scheduling conflicts have emerged as themes by exploring a small body of existing literature and personal interviews. Much of the United States is considered rural, and this study could benefit many high school band directors, seasoned and new alike. This project will serve as an example of how to improve recruiting and hopefully encourage band directors who know the challenges found therein all too well. Band directors, administrators, stakeholders, and researchers will hopefully apply this research method to build their programs, relieve their stress, and better serve their community through the potential growth of their programs.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a 10-question interview about your teaching experience. This will take approximately 30-45minutes and will also be audio or video recorded for accuracy.
2. If needed, participate in a follow-up interview to clarify any statements or answers given in the previous interview. This process will take approximately 5-10 minutes and will be audio or video recorded.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include providing much-needed advice for future music educators or current educators seeking solutions to challenges they may face in their current teaching situation.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms/codes.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Respondent Confidentiality will be the researcher's focus. Though there is always a small risk involved, in order to protect participants, the researcher will anonymize participants' identities to provide an inclusive conclusion without bias and provide a sense of privacy to ensure a more objective response without fear of retaliation from their employers. Confidential means only the researcher will be able to link individual participants to the information they provide or are associated with, but the researcher will not disclose participant identities or how named or identifiable individuals responded.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Christopher Libby. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him a[redacted] or [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Brian Stiffler, a[redacted].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1: What schedule system did/does your school use (traditional, block, rotating block, etc.)

2: Discuss the pros/cons of this schedule.

3: Can students take more than one elective or participate in more than one performance group, such as choir or drama? Sports?

4: Discuss how you go/went about recruiting for your band program

5: What kind of budget did the school provide?

6: Describe your success or failure regarding the retention of band students

7: Describe how you involve your program with the community or develop community support

8: Discuss how you recruited parent volunteers or developed a booster program?

9: Discuss some of the issues you faced teaching in a rural school

10: What advice would you give a new band director entering a teaching position at a school similar to yours?

APPENDIX F: EPOCHÈ

Those interview questions are as follows:

1: What schedule system did/does your school use (traditional, block, rotating block, etc.)

Currently, my school system uses the four-by-four block schedule. Each class is ninety minutes with an added twenty five minute homeroom at the start of each day.

2: Discuss the pros/cons of this schedule.

The pros are the extended time is certainly useful at the beginning of the year when you're trying to teach halftime show music, stand tunes, and fall concert repertoire. It's also helpful when you need to cover more fundamentals or want to sight read new music.

The cons are as students become more and more comfortable with the repertoire, it becomes difficult to fill the entire ninety minutes up. Also, ninety minutes of straight playing is detrimental to novice brass players. The biggest con though is that four by four severely limits the number of classes students can take in a year, and I often lose 3-5 students each semester so they can fit in dual enrollment or CTAE classes. In a band of 30-40 members, that's a significant loss.

3: Can students take more than one elective or participate in more than one performance group, such as choir or drama? Sports?

Students can take more than one elective if their schedule allows it which is extremely rare. Some coaches are more flexible than others when it comes to sharing students. I am open to it

because I believe that in a small school, we need to share students in order for our programs to thrive.

4: Discuss how you go/went about recruiting for your band program

We try to perform at the elementary school at least twice a year. When we go in the spring we can out information letters on how to sign up for middle school band. Our biggest day is at open house where both the middle school band director and myself will set up a sign up booth and talk to students as the walk the hallway looking to meet their new teachers. Once the school year gets rolling, I encourage my students to recruit for me. They know the students better than I do so why not? As incentive, I tell the middle school students that if they get enough students to sign up for band, I will throw them a donut party. My goal is get at least 20 students in each 6^{th}, 7^{th}, and 8^{th} grade band class.

5: What kind of budget did the school provide?

The school provides zero funding specifically for band. Occasionally discretionary funds are thrown our way. This year the county made an effort to provide each fine arts teacher with $2000. Usually we survive on ask for something and hope for the best. We survive on fundraisers and band dues.

6: Describe your success or failure regarding the retention of band students

As mentioned, four by four block causes major issues with retention due to no fault of the student. However, the problem then lies on getting the students back once they have missed. Sometimes once a student misses a semester of band, they have lost interest and I've lost the student. Also, my school has a problem with holding on to "good" students. My school is not the

best as far as student behavior and this causes parents to want to send their kids to a different school. Of course, band attracts smart well-behaved students, so usually when a parent transfers their kid out, they were probably a band kid as well.

7: Describe how you involve your program with the community or develop community support.

We are the only high school band and we have students traveling from 4-5 different neighboring towns. Whenever any of those towns have an event like a fair or parade, we are invited to participate, and we do our best to attend. We also perform for other civic event like grand openings and all our concerts are free and open to the public.

8: Discuss how you recruited parent volunteers or developed a booster program?

I have been fortunate to at least get 4-5 parents be my booster officers. So far that has been enough to cover the workload. We advertise our booster meetings but no matter how much we stress that booster does not necessarily mean volunteer or fundraise, we do not get a big turn out.

9: Discuss some of the issues you faced teaching in a rural school

Funding is my biggest concern. Being in a small town there just isn't much revenue when it comes to tax dollars. Then when we fundraise, we have every sports team, club, and other school organization, requesting money from the same mom and pop shops in town. There just isn't enough money to go around.

10: What advice would you give a new band director entering a teaching position at a school similar to yours?

The grass isn't always greener. Do the best you can with what you have. Aim to please your parents and students first. If they are happy, then admin will be happy. You can't please

everyone so don’t try to. Lastly, if you love something, it will grow. Let everything you do be a reflection of how much you love your students and your job and many problems will work itself out.