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# Characteristics of High Achieving High School Band Programs in Low Socioeconomic Settings

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**CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH ACHIEVING BAND PROGRAMS IN LOW  
SOCIOECONOMIC SETTINGS**

**BY**

**STEVEN W. ILIFF**

**B.M.E**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to all of my teachers who have inspired me to continue to learn and grow, never settle for less than excellence, and always make music education about the students.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Giebelhausen, my advisor and committee chair, for her encouragement and guidance through this process. I would also like to thank my committee members Professor Rombach-Kendall for the musical opportunities, consistent guidance, and musical mentorship as well as Dr. Regina Carlow for introducing me to research in music education, challenging me, and guiding me to focus my interests into developing this project. I would also like to give considerable gratitude to "Allison," "Bobby," and "Samuel" for their time and inviting me in to observe their programs. This project has certainly informed my teaching practice and I hope that it will do the same for others.

# **CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH ACHIEVING HIGH SCHOOL BAND PROGRAMS IN LOW SOCIOECONOMIC SETTINGS**

**by**

**Steven W. Iliff**

**BME, Music Education, University of Northern Colorado, 2008**

## **ABSTRACT**

In high school band, choir and orchestra programs across the United States, students from the lowest socio-economic profile are underrepresented (Elpus & Abril 2011). The goal of this study is to determine several best practices for teaching high school band in low socioeconomic settings. University professors with over 25 years of experience teaching in the state were asked to recommend three high school band programs in different settings that exhibited the following characteristics: 1) a high level of musical skill and achievement, 2) an excellent teacher responsible for the program, and 3) a high number of program alumni continuing to play music after high school, and 4) eligible for federal Title 1 funds—at least 40% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Three programs were recommended, one urban, one remote, and one semi-rural. Band directors at each school were interviewed, observed and submitted artifacts such as handbooks, syllabus, and performance calendars. Data from the artifacts, observations and interviews were coded for elements concerning the nature of student instruction, the educator(s) responsible for instruction, and how the program was funded and supported. *In vivo*, *process* and *concept* techniques (Saldaña, 2016) were used to group data into themes. Themes that emerged were: consistent student contact time, efficient rehearsal structure, director's outstanding musicianship, positive rapport, high expectations, vertical alignment, a team/family

atmosphere, relatively low band fees, directors pride in their position, fundraising, and parent booster programs. There are implications that students with low socioeconomic status benefit from consistent instructional time, high expectations, teachers from different levels working together, positive rapport, and a team/group mentality. There are additional implications that the profession needs to address methods for evaluation of excellence and preparation of preservice teachers to teach in a variety of settings.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Personal Orientation .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The Achievement Gap Between Socioeconomic Groups.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The Effects of “No Child Left Behind” on Music Programs in Low SES Schools .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The Effects of Charter Schools on Music Programs .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Teacher Shortage in Low SES Schools .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Initiatives by Music Education Organizations.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Cultural Relevance of High School Band .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Parental Involvement in Low SES Schools .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Program Resources for High School Marching Band.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Effects of Resources on Music Programs in Low SES Schools .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Measuring Excellence in Music Education Pedagogy .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Purpose of the Study.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Sampling Method.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Participants .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Data Collection.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Coding.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: OVERVIEW OF SUBJECT SCHOOLS.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Eastbrook High School.....</b>	<b>23</b>



<b>Meadowview High School .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Prairieland High School .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: THE NATURE OF STUDENT INSTRUCTION .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Consistency of Instructional Time .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Performance Experiences .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Efficient Rehearsal Structure .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Established Routines .....	39
Emphasis on Fundamentals .....	40
Scaffolding .....	42
Modeling .....	42
Diagnosing and Prescribing .....	43
Checking for Understanding .....	43
Positive Reinforcement .....	44
<b>Team Atmosphere.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>High, Consistent Expectations of Students.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Summary of the Nature of Instruction .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX: THE TEACHERS RESPONSIBLE FOR INSTRUCTION .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Qualities of the Directors .....</b>	<b>48</b>
High Level Musicianship .....	48
Pride in their Position .....	49
Mentorship .....	51
Understanding the Community .....	51
Summary of the Qualities of the Directors.....	54
<b>Team Teaching and Vertical Alignment .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Student Leadership.....</b>	<b>57</b>

<b>Guest Clinicians and Other Staff .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Summary of the Teachers Responsible for Instruction .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: PROGRAM FUNDING AND SUPPORT .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Administrative Support .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Financial Investment by the Students.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Booster Programs .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Summary of Program Funding and Support.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: REVIEW OF THE FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Nature of Instruction.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Directors Responsible for the Program .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Funding and Support .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Implications for Best Practices .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Reflections on the Study.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Approaches to Challenges.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Implications for Future Research .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Personal Reflection .....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Reference List.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>APPENDIX A .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>APPENDIX B .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>APPENDIX C .....</b>	<b>88</b>

**TABLES**

Table 1. *Instructional Time for Primary High School Band Class*.....35

Table 2. *School Based Concert Band Concerts per School*.....37

Table 3. *Certified Band Staff and Responsibilities*.....55

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Personal Orientation

While growing up in an upper middle class community, I was privileged to have strong music and performing arts programs that were led by experienced, passionate educators. Our 1,200 student 4A high school had a marching band, two concert bands, percussion ensemble and a jazz band that all performed at competitions, several festivals as well as school concerts and a musical every year. We had one full time band director and three instructors that would assist with marching band by teaching color guard, front ensemble percussion and battery percussion. We would go to the neighboring city for competitions and saw performances from other bands around the state. I loved performing the music and going on trips with the group. The band gave me a sense of belonging; feeling as if I was a part of something great. The music was the most memorable part of it, but being able to see so many other bands perform and meeting other musicians also had a lasting impact. This was my first impression of what high school music education should be.

It appeared to me that nearly every large high school seemed to have a flourishing program. Many of these schools served areas that appeared to me to be somewhat economically diverse. Many of the top programs were large high schools that usually included middle to upper class suburbs as well as areas with multi-family condos and apartments. Nearly all of the schools offered concert, marching, and jazz bands. For these competitive programs, it was normal to require rehearsals outside of the school day, fundraise a lot of money, charge fees, and sponsor out of town trips.

When I was student teaching, I chose a particular high school program because it had a competitive marching band, and year-round concert and jazz bands. The marching band consistently made state finals, the concert bands earned superior ratings at festivals and had been

selected to perform at several national conferences. The Jazz bands had also won awards and the top jazz combo performed yearly at national and international jazz festivals. While the program did not receive much financial support from the school district, the band boosters hosted bingo games every weekend as well as several other fundraisers and a marching band competition every fall. The organization brought in a quarter million dollars a year with which it was able to pay for weekly small group instruction on every instrument taught by professional musicians in the area. The director was a man with an incredible work ethic. He would routinely show up an hour before school, teach all day as well as several hours after school (the marching band was completely extracurricular), then go home to eat dinner with his family, and return at eight or nine o'clock to work until 11pm before going back home to bed so that he could do the whole thing the next day. While this model may not be a desirable or sustainable lifestyle for many teachers, I learned the incredible work ethic that it takes to run a large, successful band program. I assumed that when I got my first teaching job I could produce a program with similar results if I invested that same time commitment and work ethic.

After graduating, I was hired to my first teaching job. It was in a different state in a medium sized high school in a low socioeconomic area. I was the third band director at this school in four years. The program seemed to be struggling and had shrunk dramatically over the last several years. In the prior school year they had been unable to field any sort of a marching or concert band and had combined with the middle school band for concerts. I was shocked to see there were only five returning students on the roster. Despite these challenges, I was convinced that if I just ran things like the director I student taught with I would be able to grow a program comparable to the one I had worked with in my student teaching. After several years of organizing, recruiting, working, and teaching, we experienced some successes and I was able to grow the program a little, but I found that there were far more struggles with this new school and

student population that I had never experienced in my high school, undergraduate or student teaching.

I had many difficulties recruiting students due to several factors. First, the school had a negative reputation around town and many students that were zoned for this school opted to inter-zone transfer to the other public high school, or to one of the many charter and private schools in town. Next, the school was in a “redesign program”. In this initiative, students were required to be a part of a career pathway that dictated extra elective classes that they were required to take, and in order to have time in their schedules for band, they could not take any other electives out of their area and they had to take their foreign language requirements over the summer. In addition, the band programs in the middle and elementary schools had their own issues with retention, scheduling, inconsistent student matriculation patterns and lack of student contact time. In response to low reading and math scores, lower achieving students had mandatory intervention classes, and higher achieving students were encouraged to participate in a college readiness program that took the place of their only free elective.

Beyond recruitment, I also had great difficulty making decisions about after school commitments and extra-curricular performances. It has been my experience for schools to have a week or more of marching band camp before the school year and meet regularly before or after school for marching band or sectionals, perform at school athletic events, and have several concerts and competitive performances each semester. The administrators at this school had similar expectations. Athletics and community involvement was imperative to them, so we performed at all home football games as well as the town parades. The district music department also required our participation in district honor band, solo and ensemble, large group festival, several school based concerts and recruitment concerts each year.

When I started, I took the approach with students at this school that I was used to: five days of marching band camp and two after school rehearsals a week, all required. This was actually a conservative rehearsal schedule compared to all of the programs that I had worked with up until then. Attendance at these rehearsals was atrocious. Even after personally calling households to share the times and invite them, anywhere from 20-50% of the group would be absent. The same was true with performances. What made matters worse was that at each rehearsal we were missing a different 20-50% of the students. While some were more truant than others, this was not isolated to one group of kids. These rehearsals were demoralizing to me and the students who attended because we knew that we would have to repeat nearly everything we worked on for the students that were not there. I began to deeply question my teaching ability. Were students choosing to miss because of my rehearsal skills or the music that we were playing? Many of the students that missed seemed to enjoy playing music during our in class rehearsals. The students often came in to high school behind in musical skills and a large portion of the band had little prior experience. Even with simple music there was no way that we could prepare for all of the performances expected of us in the four hours a week that our class met and still teach the musical fundamentals that they needed to be successful. I wondered how I could better enforce the co-curricular expectation of my ensemble.

My initial approach was to stick to my plan, have a hard line policy and remove students when they missed. I figured that eventually the students who came regularly would see their progress and others would join and eventually good attendance would become the new norm for the program. I soon realized that often times absences were not caused by irresponsibility or apathy from the students, but by their family situation. Students were often required by their parents to get jobs or babysit siblings and many families seemed to always be in some sort of crisis either having to move houses or relatives being in the hospital. Getting transportation was

also an issue, as many households only had one car that the parents used, and since the parents often worked outside of normal business hours, students could not find a ride. The few students that did attend extra-curricular rehearsals regularly were highly involved and often had conflicts with several other school activities. Many of these students however, would leave their sophomore or junior year to attend charter schools so that they would be more academically challenged. I found myself at a crossroads. I had always thought that the more active and involved my band program would be, the better experience the students would have and the more they would want to participate and recruit their friends. While this approach worked for some students, and there was some program growth in size and quality I could never seem to get over about thirty students. I began to wonder if I was expecting too much of these students and families? Did I need to rethink my rehearsal and performance expectations? Did I need to rethink my curriculum in the music that we were performing?

Meanwhile, during this time I was regularly attending national and state music education conferences as well as conducting workshops. I was determined to continue to hone my musical and teaching ability so that I could run more efficient rehearsals and better serve my students. At these conferences I attended many honor band performances from the top programs. I noticed that many of the groups were from schools that served primarily middle to upper socioeconomic areas. When I looked through the list of students selected for the All State Band, the majority of these students came from the same large middle to upper income schools. All of the honor groups were obviously taught by great music educators and many of them had a lot of experience. Overall, many of these programs were similar to my student teaching placement. They were middle to upper income suburban schools taught by an experienced director with the resources to hire additional instrumental staff. They had additional rehearsals outside the school day and held many performances. This is the first time in my career I began to wonder if perhaps



it took more than just a passionate hard working teacher to build a large high quality band program. Were there some areas and student populations where one could not achieve the same results? Should a director lower their expectations on time commitment and possibly change their curriculum because of the economic situation of their student population? There are obviously much more important intrinsic reasons to teach music, but ambition to achieve certain extrinsic motivators such as performing sophisticated music, honor ensemble participation, high contest scores, and state and nationwide recognition can make a difference for some people when considering where one would like to work as a music educator.

In 2011, Elpus and Abril constructed a national profile of high school band, choir, and orchestra students using data from the 2002 longitudinal study. They found that 21% of the class of 2004 seniors participated in a music ensemble, but that males, Hispanics, English Language Learners, children of parents holding less than a high school diploma, and students in the lowest socioeconomic (SES) profile were significantly underrepresented, and that White students, students from high SES backgrounds, native english speakers, students in high standardized test quartiles, students with a high GPA, and children of parents with postsecondary degrees were over-represented (Elpus & April 2011). Kinney (2010) found that higher academic students were more likely to begin middle school band and that females and children from higher SES backgrounds were more likely to persist.

There are many explanations why there exists this representation gap in secondary music ensembles between socioeconomic lines. Band music as it is currently being taught may not be culturally relevant to students in low socioeconomic areas (Lamont, A. & Maton, K. 2010, Kelly-McHale, J. and Abril, C. R. 2015). Perhaps there is a lack of relevance in certain kinds of competition and other ways that the music education profession has come to measure success (Allsup & Benedict 2008). Additional contributing factors may be the numerous non-school

related concerns occupying the students' time, a lack of resources from the school district (Bates 2012, Wright, 2010), families' inability to pay fees or have the time to fundraise (Fitzpatrick-Harnish 2015), a failure of the school district to recruit and retain great teachers (Jacob 2007, Nicole R. Robinson 2017), and the recent flight of students and funding to small charter schools that aren't set up to support a band program (Aprile 2017, Hedgecoth 2017). Also, one cannot overlook that many low socioeconomic schools often come with the label 'low performing' in other subjects outside of music (Fitzpatrick-Harnish 2015, National Center for Education Statistics). Due to mandates imposed by political reforms, these 'low performing' schools are sometimes forced to adapt education models that are incongruent with traditional music education (Branscome 2012, Elpus 2014, 2013, Sanders 2014). While there are certainly examples of truth to all of these explanations, I find it more constructive to focus on solutions.

In this thesis I will investigate several case studies in high achieving high school band programs that serve low socioeconomic areas. Through this research I hope to find out information related to how the teachers in those programs in low socioeconomic areas approach some of the challenges that I experienced. Ideally this data might be conglomerated into some best practices in how to address program funding, teacher recruitment and preparation, as well as student instructional (rehearsal) time. This study is guided by the following Grand Tour question and sub-questions: What are best practices in high achieving high school band programs that serve low socioeconomic areas?

1. What is the nature of student instruction?
2. Who is responsible for the instruction in the program?
3. How is the program funded and supported?

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### The Achievement Gap Between Socioeconomic Groups

Data of the achievement gap between middle and low socioeconomic schools has been well documented in subjects other than music. Based on standardized tests administered by the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2015), 20% of eighth graders from schools eligible for the Nationwide Free and Reduced School Lunch Program (NSLP) tested proficient or above in reading compared to 47% in schools not eligible (NAEP, 2015). In math 18% were proficient or above compared to 47% in non-NSLP, and in science it was 18% versus 46% of students in non-NSLP schools<sup>1</sup> (NAEP, 2015). Different assessments produced similar results. Sandy & Duncan (2010) found that a significant gap in scores on the Armed Services Aptitude Test between Urban and Rural schools could be explained mostly by a high concentration of disadvantaged students. NAEP also administered music and arts assessments nationally to

measure student's ability to respond to music, which included analyzing and critiquing musical performances, identify and explain musical notation, describing the emotion or mood of a composition, and identifying the region of (sic) origin or social context of a musical excerpt. The music portion also included one creating question that asked students to use music notation to write an ending to a rhythmic pattern. (NAEP, 2015 "Sample Questions in Music," para. 2)

Students from NSLP eligible schools scored on average 26 points lower nationally than those from non NSLP eligible schools on this music exam.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Association of Educational Progress groups student test results in Reading, Science, and Mathematics into four categories: *Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced*.

### **The Effects of “No Child Left Behind” on Music Programs in Low SES Schools**

Federal education mandates such as ‘No Child Left Behind’ and the emphasis on standardized testing may be forcing lower-achieving students out of ensembles (Bransome 2012, Elpus 2014, Sanders, 2014). The 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as “No Child Left Behind,” was intended to narrow the achievement gap by requiring that school systems report test scores, graduation and retention rates, and school safety reports to the Federal Government, however, music education advocates argue that it resulted in an increased emphasis on math, language, and science and decreased emphasis on arts, music and other non-tested subjects (Branscome, 2012). Many secondary programs experienced a decrease in instructional minutes, and music staffing and an increase in student fees after NCLB legislation (Sanders, 2004; Fitzpatrick-Harnish, 2015). Students in schools that score low in math, reading and science are often required to take extra tutoring and remediation that often take the place of music and arts classes (Fitzpatrick-Harnish, 2015; Rusinek & Arostegui 2015, Kelly-McHale & Abril, 2015). A 2004 survey similar to the NAEP survey mentioned above found that students in extremely-low socioeconomic schools reported fewer music course offerings (Schneider, 2004). A different longitudinal study of data from 1982 to 2009 found overall music enrollment to be stable, but that there was an increased under-representation of Hispanic students, English Language Learners, and students with Individual Education Plans (Elpus, 2014).

### **The Effects of Charter Schools on Music Programs**

Another educational reform affecting students in some low socioeconomic areas is the advent and proliferation of charter schools. According to Chapman and Donnor (2015) charter schools began in 1991 as a result of the marketplace theory that more school choices would lead to schools having to compete for students and thus lead to better schooling. Since then, charter

schools in the U.S. have increased from 2% to 5% of all public schools, and are overwhelmingly located in low-income, urban communities (Chapman & Donnor 2015). A 2014-2015 study of charter schools in New York City found that traditional public schools were more likely to provide music classes taught by a certified music teacher than charter schools, and that charters that focused more on academics or character in their mission were less likely to offer music (Aprile, 2017). In Ohio, a different survey study found that charter schools did not consistently offer music, and those that did employed a music teacher on a part-time status and did not offer significant monetary or logistical support (Hedgecoth, 2017). Since the presence and size of secondary music programs in schools is strongly correlated to school size (Chapman & Donnor 2015, Fitzpatrick Harnish 2015), the increase in number of schools has caused a perceived downturn in music education opportunities in places like Milwaukee that have experienced a rapid growth in secondary school choice options (Syme, 2015).

Other studies also suggest that in many places participation in school choice is more related to school demographics than school performance, and that Charter schools can sometimes lead to increased segregation by class and race (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang 2011, Ni & Arsen 2011)

### **Teacher Shortage in Low SES Schools**

Another issue that can greatly impact music education is teacher turnover. A 2007 study of teacher turnover in five different districts nationwide found a correlation between low income, low performing schools and higher teacher turnover (Barnes & Crowe 2007). This same study found that the districts spend anywhere from \$4,366-\$17,872 per teacher in recruitment and training to replace them (Barnes & Crowe 2007). Administrators in some districts have addressed the supply side by offering incentives and recruitment as well as the demand side by offering mentorship and increased support, but teacher shortages remain more severe in certain

subjects and at certain schools (Jacob 2007). According to Jacob (2007), urban and low performing schools have more difficulty attracting teachers and are more likely to have less experienced or highly qualified teachers than their suburban counterparts. However, it is important to note that teacher characteristics have little relationship with student outcomes on standardized tests (Jacob 2007), and that no correlation has been found between school socioeconomic status and teacher quality (Kelly-McHale & Abril 2015).

Music teacher turnover can greatly affect participation rates in ensembles (Glover, 2015). Robinson (2017) found in one large, urban district that higher rates of middle school band and choir as well as high school choir teacher turnover correlated with lower school populations and higher numbers of ethnic minorities, but that high school band turnover had no correlation. Another study in 2010 found that music teachers cited dissatisfaction with the workplace, better teaching assignments, and better salary and benefits as reasons for leaving (Gardner 2010). The same study also found music teachers were more likely to be itinerant or part-time and less likely to receive support for working with students with special needs. Perceived administrative support was the most influential factor in Gardner's 2010 study of teacher satisfaction and retention. Olson (2009) found that music teachers who are young, female, and ethnic minorities were more likely to leave their school or the profession.

### **Initiatives by Music Education Organizations**

Providing support to address the growing inequality above has become a prominent movement in many music education organizations. The Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic has begun offering a series of workshops designed to assist Band and Orchestra directors working in Title I, and small schools (Midwest Clinic, 2018)

In her book *Urban Music Education*, Fitzpatrick-Harnish (2015), argues that so much of the literature and data focuses on the achievement gap between socioeconomic levels without

recognizing the opportunity gap in housing, food, safety and enrichment experiences as well as formal school preparation. This can lead to what researchers refer to as a deficit view of certain low-SES schools and sometimes students of certain racial or ethnic groups (Fitzpatrick, 2015, Kelly-McHale, & Abril, 2015). According to Fitzpatrick (2015). The deficit view is that there is something inherently wrong with low SES students and that they must be fixed or avoided.

Every school setting and music program is different. Urban schools are not “less than” schools in any other context and more than they are “more than.” All schools, in all contexts, are “different from” one another, and, to be most effective, every music teacher in every setting must develop a specific approach to their pedagogy. (Fitzpatrick, 2015, p 3).

Fitzpatrick (2015), also discusses the need to avoid a *colorblind* or *difference blind* approach. Often well intentioned, it subtly diminishes student individuality and fails to acknowledge systemic biases.

Social justice and equity in music education has been a widely discussed topic in recent literature. Allsup and Shieh (2012) make the argument that teachers are powerful members in our society and that it is their duty to get to know their students and act in their best interests by recognizing inequalities and working to make high quality music classes a safe and equitable place. The desire to incorporate social justice in music education courses, however, is far from universal. A 2017 survey study by Salvador and Kelly-McHale found 50% of surveyed music education programs addressed social justice in *difference-blind* terms, 10-15% of respondent schools rejected teaching social justice in their undergraduate curriculum, but about the same amount were interested in learning more about it.

### **Cultural Relevance of High School Band**

Wind band leadership has been overwhelmingly dominated by white males (Confredo, 2012) and although this study does not fixate on any particular ethnic subgroup, 20% of the people living in poverty identify as Hispanic (U.S. Census, 2016), and the under-representation of Hispanic/Latino students and cultural relevance of band deserves discussion. The terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably in most studies as well as the U.S. Census as terms to identify people whose ancestors originate from twenty Spanish speaking countries (D’Vera, 2012). Participants self-identify in census studies and while some people prefer one or the other, the terms are used interchangeably (Passel & Taylor 2009). These Hispanic/Latino students are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population and are also underrepresented per capita in high school music programs (Kelly-McHale & Abril 2015). Some reasons for this may be that the extracurricular component of many band programs may not be feasible or approachable by some families, especially if they are first generation immigrants (Camacho & Fuligni, 2015). Competition for things like chair placement and the autocratic leadership of a conductor may be incompatible with the allocentrism in many Hispanic/Latino cultures (Kelly-McHale & Abril 2015). There also may just not be enough teachers or band directors with a Hispanic background in the profession (Confredo 2012, Kruse 2013).

Students in some cultures also have difficulty understanding power structures and organization, both of which can be unique in instrumental music. Allsup and Benedict (2008) criticize the rehearsal methods and power structures of the wind band tradition in America as being autocratic, oppressive, overly dependent on tradition, and lacking self-reflection. Fitzpatrick-Harnish (2015) argues that power structures are necessary, but that many students must sometimes be taught what gives certain people authority, understand how they fit into the



system, and answer for themselves if it is a just distribution of power. In some organizations the cooperative nature found in certain Latino cultures can be utilized and developed in a large ensemble environment. Although it is not necessarily band oriented, the *El Sistema* program that originated in Venezuela has become a worldwide phenomenon in providing music education to youth in low socioeconomic countries. The program prides itself on appealing to the communalism of large music ensembles (Tunstall and Booth, 2016). Marshall Marcus, president of El Sistema Europe attests:

The way kids learn instruments in Venezuela is the way kids naturally learn anything: in relation to others, in practice. The way we in Europe have created music learning acts as a brake on the natural tendencies of kids to play together. (Tunstall & Booth, 2016 p.124)

According to Richard Holloway, head of the Scottish Arts Council:

In Venezuela these children were immediately introduced to what I call the communalism of the orchestra from the beginning. That was the complete reversal of the European classical music pedagogy where you slug away for years, and if you're lucky you'll get into an ensemble. (Tunstall & Booth, 2016 p.124)

Increased student ownership has been an educational priority of many music ensembles. A multiple case study performed in 2012 found that middle school students fell into certain roles in their school band, and that students who felt success in their roles were less likely to drop it for another class (Hoffman, 2012)

The cultural relevance of the music performed in ensembles is another commonly discussed topic. Britten (2014) studied 4th-6th graders and found a significant but slight correlation between identification with a culture and preference for a music chosen to represent that culture as well as student music preferences aligned with those of adults at home. This

suggests that the cultural identification and home environment has an influence on musical preference. Much had also been written about the incorporation or neglect of popular music in school ensembles. Lamont & Maton (2010) acknowledge a tendency of music educators to focus entirely on serious music and ignore popular music. They suggest that popular music may serve as a gateway to engage students in music making, but also that popular music may serve a different function for students outside of school. Aligning the music that is popular with students, and not demeaning it, may be a way for teachers to better connect with their student's culture (Fitzpatrick-Harnish, 2015). However, western ensembles may be more adept to a traditional education setting. Based on their research of the *El Sistema* program Tunstall & Booth (2016, pp. 160-161) suggest that the symphony orchestra is useful because of the flexible structure and the large instrumentation that can accommodate many members of the ensemble. They also answer the question "Why Western art music?"

The Western classical music tradition, as it has developed over many centuries, has produced an especially eloquent musical language. Its highly varied instrumental timbres, its melodic sophistication and harmonic complexity, its structural plasticity, its ability to absorb and manipulate elements of other musical traditions—all these attributes mean that classical music has the capacity to communicate an exceptional range of emotive experience. (Tunstall & Booth, 2016, pp. 160-161)

Some schools have also incorporated Mariachi programs to appeal to more Hispanic students. Students in these programs typically learn guitar, violin, or trumpet in middle school and participate in a high school mariachi ensemble. The Mariachi tradition comes out of Western Mexico and is a symbol of Mexican pride. There are currently Mariachi education conferences in Arizona, New Mexico, California and Texas (Clark, 2005).

### **Parental Involvement in Low SES Schools**

According to Fitzpatrick-Harnish (2015, pp.34-35) poor people usually work more hours a week, are more likely to work multiple jobs, work evenings, have jobs without paid leave, and are less likely to afford childcare and transportation; however, they have the same work ethic, and value education the same as their wealthier counterparts. A study by Zdzinski (1992) in northern Pennsylvania found no correlation between parental involvement and musical aptitude or performance in middle school students. However, a study in Alabama found that a positive home environment and parental involvement were higher for All-State Choir and Band participants (Hickock, 2009).

### **Program Resources for High School Marching Band**

One of the most time and money intensive aspects of band programs is the marching band. A study of Arizona Marching Bands found that contest scores correlated with many variables including the school's marching band budget, total band program budget, number of part-time assistant/non-certified marching staff, marching band enrollment, total band program enrollment, number of festivals attended, school enrollment, and concurrence with concert programs (Rickels, 2008). The same study found no correlation between teacher's years of experience, years at the current school, number of full-time staff, rehearsal hours, geographic locale, co-participation requirements, Title I status, or directors rank of marching band priority among other band programs. Bands of America, a division of Music for All, hosts regional and national marching band competitions. Mulcahy (2017) found that the average annual budget for a band competing in BOA nationals was over \$77,000, and that many non-national bands declined attendance because of travel expenses and other local opportunities. Because of the time and

expenses of marching band competitions, it is understandable that this musical medium or format may not be feasible for certain schools and situations.

### **Effects of Resources on Music Programs in Low SES Schools**

As discussed before, Fitzpatrick-Harnish (2015) found the strongest predictor of music availability is school size and socioeconomic level. Low SES programs often require that more resources are provided by the school, including instruments, however Ester & Turner (2009) found no differences in attitude or achievement between students borrowing school instruments and those that owned personal instruments. A study of low SES middle school instrumental music programs in Michigan with high-participation rates in band suggests that proactive teacher strategies, culturally relevant ensembles, and student ownership of the ensemble process improved recruiting and retention (Albert, 2005). Deisler (2011) did a study of high quality high school band programs in high and low socioeconomic areas and compared teachers', students', and administrators' perceptions of the causes of success as well as the perceived role of band in the students' lives. Students, teachers and administrators perceived that the high expectations from the band director, band director's knowledge, and tradition of success had the most influence on the success of the band program. Student private lessons was perceived to have very little influence as well as successful fundraisers, adequate funding, quality feeder schools, and other directors coming to help. Deisler (2011) also found that "it gives me musical skills" was the most common response given for the value of band in the students' lives and answered to a greater extent in programs with low socioeconomic status.

### **Measuring Excellence in Music Education Pedagogy**

It would be incomplete to perform a study on music excellence in low socioeconomic schools without addressing and acknowledging aspects of excellent teachers. A study of three world renowned artist teachers found similarities organized into three primary themes: goals and

expectations, effecting change, and conveying information (Simmons & Duke, 2006). An additional qualitative study on excellent wind band conductors organized the five areas of educational connoisseurship (structural, curricular, evaluative, intentional, and pedagogical) into processes for preparing for rehearsal, executing rehearsal, reflecting, and continuing professional development (Barry & Henry 2014).

### **Summary**

In high school band, choir and orchestra programs across the United States, students from the lowest socio-economic profile are underrepresented (Elpus & Abril 2011). The best predictors of availability of music ensembles are school size and socioeconomic status (Fitzpatrick-Harnish 2015). Impediments keeping low-socioeconomic students from access to quality programs could include: systems of education that do not address the opportunity gap in low socioeconomic areas (Fitzpatrick-Harnish 2015), an increase of student fees as a result of decreased funding for the arts due to political reforms (Elpus 2014, Fitzpatrick-Harnish 2015), oppressive traditions and rehearsal techniques associated with large music ensembles (Allsup & Benedict 2008, Camacho & Fuligni 2015), cultural relevance of the music performed (Brittin 2014), and difficulties staffing low-socioeconomic schools with teachers (Jacob 2007, Robinson 2017). Low socioeconomic schools that have had high participation in band have exhibited proactive teacher strategies, culturally relevant ensembles, and student ownership of the ensemble process (Albert 2005). The most common reasons given for the success of high quality high school band programs were “band director’s high expectations,” “band director’s knowledge,” and “tradition of success.” (Deisler 2011)

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Purpose of the Study

This overall goal of this study was to establish best practices of high achieving band programs in low-socioeconomic areas in a southwest state. This was accomplished by examining the nature of student instruction, the background and characteristics of the teacher and/or staff, and the structure and sources of support and funding. High school band was chosen for the study because it is often one of the most time intensive and financially cumbersome ensembles (Mulcahy, 2017, Rickels, 2008).

### Sampling Method

Determining an unbiased sampling method for evaluating excellence in music programs is problematic. Using awards from competitions creates a bias toward schools that can afford to attend competitions and places too much reliance on subjective and sometimes flawed evaluation systems. Using high enrollment and retention numbers is not always a valid measure because it doesn't always reflect the level of achievement especially in programs with fewer elective offerings or where music participation may be compulsory. Additionally, looking only at the difficulty of literature a group performs is not always an accurate reflection of the quality of performance or the quantity of music performed.

Due to the problems stated above, a purposeful, criterion sampling method (Gay & Airasian 2003) was selected to find critical cases of three excellent band programs in diverse, Title 1 schools from different settings ranging from urban to rural. Two university professors with backgrounds in music education and wind band conducting, both with over 25 years of experience teaching in the state, were consulted to recommend three high school band programs that exhibit the following measures of excellence: 1) A high level of musical skill and achievement, 2) an excellent teacher responsible for the program, and 3) a high number of

program alumni continuing to play music after high school. All three programs must be eligible for federal Title 1 funds meaning at least 40% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Names and locations of these schools, directors and administrators will be referred to by pseudonym throughout the study. Since only two expert educators were surveyed, and they were from the same university, a possible selection bias may have been present to favor programs in relative proximity to the University and programs that had been observed.

### **Participants**

The three participating programs were located in different settings. The first was in a mid-sized town in a relatively rural area that has had a long tradition of success in band competitions, but also served a low-socioeconomic population. According to state data, the school had a free and reduced lunch rate of 51%. This program had resources and has been known to travel to competitions in neighboring states. The head director was known to be an experienced veteran educator and was highly regarded by colleagues. Other directors in the district taught at middle schools as well as assisted at the high school. Bands from this program have been selected as honor ensembles and have won many awards.

The second participating program was from a mid-sized urban, inner-city school that has been known for success in the past despite being in a low-socioeconomic area and a notoriously 'rough' part of town. The school was over 90% free and reduced lunch based on data from the state. The head director was younger and was well known for her rapport with students and the high musical quality that her ensembles have displayed at concerts and contest. This program also offered at least one non-traditional ensemble that had been selected as a state honor group. Several different middle schools fed into this program that were taught by younger, newer directors who also assisted at the high school.

The third program was in a relatively rural low-SES area surrounded by mostly farmland, but still in commutable distance from some suburban areas. According to state data, the school was 58% free and reduced lunch. This smaller high school has several bands and was also known for success in concert festivals. The head director was a veteran teacher in the middle of his career, and he was assisted by two other directors that teach at the middle school and several feeder elementary schools.

### **Data Collection**

Data was gathered from the band directors and programs in several phases. First, artifacts from the program were collected. Artifacts include handbooks, syllabi, rehearsal schedules, performance calendars, and concert programs or a list of recently performed repertoire. Semi-structured interviews (see appendix B) of approximately 45 minutes with each head band director were recorded via audio recorder and transcribed. The final data component was a qualitative observation of one band rehearsal in each school. One rehearsal observation took place during the spring semester. As a non-participant observer, observation notes were taken using a written *t chart* (Gay & Airasian 2003) (appendix C). The band rehearsals were also recorded via audio recorder and verbiage of the director was transcribed. Participants were referred to by pseudonym in all written documents.

### **Coding**

Data from the artifacts, transcripts from the interviews and rehearsals were coded in two cycles. Transcripts of the interviews, as well as the handbooks and notes on the observation *t chart* were coded using the *In Vivo* coding method (Saldaña 2016) for elements concerning the nature of student contact and instruction, who is responsible for instruction, and the sources of program funding (appendix A). Data that suggests values of the directors, and values of the community was also coded for and sorted later to give a more complete picture of the culture of



each program. The rehearsal transcripts were coded using *process coding* (Saldaña 2016) for examples of instructional practices observed. The researcher must acknowledge that since they had a background in music education a bias may have been present to code for known educational methods and best practices. Second cycle *pattern* and *focused* coding methods were used to group the coded examples into observable themes that were present in all three of these band programs. Chapters five, six, and seven will discuss evidence from the data supporting of each these themes. These themes will suggest some similarities between the three programs which might imply some best practices for band programs in low socioeconomic areas.

## CHAPTER FOUR: OVERVIEW OF SUBJECT SCHOOLS

The following chapter will give an introduction and overview to each of the three band programs selected for the study. This chapter will ideally give the reader a clear picture of the attitudes and practices of each director, a description of each school community and an overview of the information that was obtained through the interviews and the artifact analysis of each program. The three schools were selected partially because they were low socioeconomic status, identified to be high achieving, and located in different settings.

### **Eastbrook High School**

In the preliminary phase of consulting about this research, Eastbrook High School (pseudonym) or EHS was immediately recommended. It was a mid to large high school in an urban area that offered marching band, a concert band, jazz band, a high school beginning band and a steel drum ensemble. Their director, Allison (pseudonym) was in her sixth year at EHS and had grown the program significantly in size and quality during her tenure. One of the things that Allison was most excited to talk about was having two new, younger educators at her feeder middle schools with whom she regularly collaborated. She spent several hours a week visiting the middle school classes and getting to know the students that would soon be attending EHS. Allison said that visiting the middle schools had been great for her because she developed relationships with students and brushed up on her “beginning band chops”. She emphasized the importance of fundamental teaching, so many of the skills the students learned in their sixth-eighth grade ensembles continued to be reinforced at the high school level. Assisting the younger classes also helped her differentiate instruction. In the past she has had students come into her high school ensembles with a low level of musical literacy, and lacking fundamental concepts such as producing a characteristic sound on their instruments. Working with the middle schools, Allison attests, is the primary reason her program has grown so much in size in the recent years.

With her booster program, she was able to raise a small amount of money to pay for the two middle school directors to work with her marching band during their summer band camp, at zero hour and at football games. Her marching band had a two and a half week band camp before school starts and then meets daily from 6:30am to 8:15am. The group met zero hour and first period, so the students needed to get themselves to school an hour early in the morning. A few were dropped off by parents, but many of them walked or took the city bus. During the fall marching season the group also rehearsed one evening a week. The marching band performed at home football games, three marching band competitions, and one parade. All of the students in the marching band were also in the concert band when the marching season concluded in early November. Marching band was a requirement. This concert/marching group is the “core of her program”.

Eastbrook High School was surrounded by low income housing in an old part of the city. According to Allison, what decades ago was known as a nice part of town has become a lower socioeconomic status as the city has expanded to the north and west. Additionally, EHS is diverse in culture. Allison described it as 15 little sub-communities like “little Mexico” and “little Vietnam.” There was a high Hispanic population as well as African-American, Asian, and Caucasian students. One of the challenges Allison faced at her school was that many of the students were English Language Learners and many of them spoke a primary language other than Spanish. This created a challenge because most of the TESOL and language services were catered to Spanish speakers, and there was not always another student or adult that could translate. She was proud how her school community found ways “to get these students going” and help them learn without always using words. According to Allison, most of the students at Eastbrook High School portrayed a culture of acceptance of people from different backgrounds.

Building a culture of excellence in her band program where they were “very high achieving with very high standards” was something she mentioned often. She did this by promoting a team-like and family atmosphere. She constantly referred to the group as their “Band Fam” to the students because “they are all in it together and the expectation is that they are a responsible member of the group.” (Allison, interview, 4/18/18) They may not always get along, but Allison demanded that “they must be respectful and supportive of everybody, all of the time and this is inside and outside of class.” (interview, 4/18/18) Students were drawn to the band program there because it has a reputation of success and there were not many other programs in Eastbrook high school that had the same success. Even though the rehearsal schedule was rigorous, the students in the band at EHS showed up because Allison pushed them. She attested that many of them came from difficult backgrounds, were not pushed or always held accountable in other areas of their lives, and that they got that from the band program. The students responded to the balance of accountability and community, creating a thriving program.

This kind of culture obviously did not happen overnight. It took time for Allison to set this up while constantly reinforcing expectations. Before and during rehearsal she took notes on students and checked in with the few students who were late or absent. She expressed concern regarding sustaining the success of the program as it grows. When the program was only 20 students she was able to give each student individual attention and address their needs, but she is troubled that this same support would be much more difficult to provide if the program grows beyond 80 students. According to Allison, her budget was small and she could not afford “techs” for the marching band. She used stock percussion arrangements for her marching shows, taught colorguard by herself with minimal guidance, and relied heavily on student leadership. The district provided busing to the local stadium for home football games, a small instrument repair budget, and a mill levy fund that could only be used for new instruments. All additional funding

came from the booster program from a march-a-thon donation fundraiser, and other fundraisers. She required a band fee of \$125 and offered a scholarship form that the students can fill out to waive up to \$100 of the fee if their family could not afford it. Students had to pay at least \$25 so that there was some amount of buy-in as well as the expectation that they participate in fundraising. The band performed at three marching competitions, a winter parade and carnival, several school-based concerts, district solo and ensemble, large group festival, a jazz festival, and also hosted a chamber music recital. More advanced students also participated in the all-state and all-district honor groups.

Allison loved teaching at Eastbrook High School. She grew up in an affluent part of town, performed in a large band program, participated in all-state, a member of the local youth symphony and “was definitely a band kid” (interview 4/18/18). She earned a performance degree at a large public university in a neighboring state, but decided to return home to pursue teaching after sustaining a performance injury. She student taught and eventually was hired at Eastbrook High School. She valued her position and program because it was dramatically different than the “behemoth” of a high school program that she grew up in. She loved the students and loved teaching at that school.

### **Meadowview High School**

Meadowview High School (pseudonym) was in a small town of about 33,000 people. They did not consider themselves rural, but they were classified as remote because of the large distance from neighboring cities. Bobby (pseudonym) the director of the MHS band program shared that he recently discovered that the town was in one of the 25 poorest counties in the country and that growing up in a poor coal mining town himself, he was proud to be able to offer a great band program to his students. When he was in middle and high school, he needed band, and was happy to see his students achieve. Although the surrounding area had a low

socioeconomic status, Meadowview High School had a long band history and tradition. Bobby was only the third head band director there since 1956 and attested that the community greatly valued the band program. Even though other programs in the school have fluctuated over the years, “the community would not stand for the band not to be successful.”(Bobby, interview, 4/11/18)

In the small community, one of the huge advantages according to Bobby was that it was a one high school town and there were three middle schools that all fed into a freshman academy and then one high school. According to Bobby, the band program began in the middle schools and all the band educators in these schools worked together to achieve vertical alignment and similar expectations. Bobby’s position was not only at the high school, but also to oversee the whole program. The vertical alignment in the program was the most aligned it had been in the 23 years that Bobby had taught there. Bobby started at Meadowview 23 years ago as an assistant director after struggling to secure a position in his home state. He became a middle school band teacher for a few years before becoming the head band director at the high school 18 years ago. Each of three middle schools had a band director. There was a director at the freshmen academy and the high school had a head director, an assistant director, and a percussion specialist that oversaw percussion instruction for the entire district. There were seven directors in total.

Bobby emphasized that the directors at MHS worked collaboratively and had consistent expectations of students in every grade. As a district, they focused heavily on fundamentals and individual student development. Students were expected to learn all scales, arpeggios, slur patterns, and music fundamentals on their instrument and are tested at least once every nine weeks. All seven of the band directors in the district assisted with the marching band and had different responsibilities. The band directors in the district and the music education coordinator meet weekly in professional learning communities (PLC). Often at the PLC, all of the directors

bring scores and recordings of their bands playing warm ups, sight reading, and concert music. They listen to recordings and give each other feedback. Bobby also insists that each teacher holds high rehearsal expectations for their students that they are on time, prepared, quiet, focused, and that 20-30% of the time is focused on music fundamentals. He insists that the directors “don’t teach notes, they teach music fundamentals and the notes come.” (interview, 4/11/18)

The Meadowview program began in sixth grade where students were divided into three instrument classes: flutes, clarinet and saxophone in one class, trumpet and trombone in the other. Percussion started in the 7th grade and they were selected from the wind instruments. The students then progressed into the 7th grade concert band, 8th grade symphonic band, and then split into two bands at the Freshmen academy; one top band and one smaller group of students that “need more time to develop.” (interview, 4/11/18) Freshmen joined the high school for marching band which was mandatory in the fall, and then split into separate concert bands in the spring. The high school also had a concert band, jazz band, and wind symphony. Bobby called the marching band their “bread and butter” (follow up interview, 4/12/18) in the fall and the primary reason they were able to engage the community. The marching band had some summer rehearsals and then met during zero hour (before school) and first period; from 7:30-9:15am daily. The also had one evening rehearsal each week. The concert bands in the middle school were also required to do one sectional a week outside of school. According to Bobby, because of the success of the marching band, the community was supportive of the concert ensembles when they performed more modern, sophisticated, less accessible music such as the wind symphony’s recent performance of Karel Husa’s *Music for Prague* or Paul Hindemith’s *Symphony in B flat*.

There was a constant process of changing and assessing what music would be successful and received well by the community. Bobby was always trying to balance out the traditional

band pieces with things that are more modern. He was especially focused on this strategy when choosing marching band shows. He tried to choose themes that the students and the community will appreciate, while not overdoing or reusing the same ideas and concepts.

According to Bobby, the community in Meadowview was blue collar and not afraid to work hard. They have a “push them down and they get back up and ask for more” (interview, 4/11/18) kind of mentality. The program was about 50-60% Hispanic, 5% African American and 40-45% Caucasian. Even though the MHS band was successful in competitions outside of Meadowview, parents did not talk to Bobby about the band’s competitive successes. The community valued the hard work and the soft skills that students learned in the band program. He referred to the band as a team. Students needed to show up and work hard in rehearsal and get good grades in school to stay eligible and “not to let the team down.” Employers in town looked to hire band students because they knew how to work hard and how to show up early and prepared. These are the kinds of skills that are valued in the community. Bobby believed that one of the best recent ideas the band educator collective had at MHS was the addition of a fall wind ensemble class. In this class, advanced students worked on small ensemble skills and musical challenges that they would not normally get with marching band.

Bobby attributed a lot of their success to the support of his school district and the band boosters. He commended them for working hard to try and make public school truly free for the students. The band program charged a \$100 fee for gloves, shirts, and uniform usage. According to Bobby, if they charged much more than that he would likely lose half the kids in his band. They do take some trips, but Bobby is careful to keep the price down. The last trip they took cost about \$450 a student and there were ample opportunities for them to fundraise by selling concessions at athletic events, a March-a-thon, and a beef raffle (a community favorite). They



also received small donations from local businesses, but were constantly concerned about asking for much, because they did not want to create a bad reputation for the band.

### **Prairieland High School**

The third recommended band program was Prairieland High School (pseudonym). Prairieland High was located in a rural area, but within commutable distance from some suburban areas. The demographic of Prairieland High School (PHS) was fairly diverse. PHS had a high Hispanic population as well as a high immigrant population. The head director Samuel (pseudonym) had been at the school since it opened, and was thrilled to work with the two other band directors to build a program from scratch. According to Samuel, many of their students were immigrants and concerned about the senate debate over the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. The area surrounding PHS was rural and composed of mostly farmland. It had a mostly low socioeconomic status but there was some older money as well. According to Samuel, the families that did have some money had worked hard for it and valued hard work and perseverance. Much of the lower income population at Prairieland also valued hard work as a necessary means for survival. Several of the elementary schools were 100% free and reduced lunch, and even though the total percentage of free and reduced lunch dropped off at the high school, Samuel noted that there was a suspicion that this was only because many families did not fill out the paperwork.

Samuel was one of three band directors that co-taught at the high school, one middle school, and several elementary schools. The three directors taught at the high school in the morning where Samuel directed the wind symphony, another director Dirk (pseudonym) teaches symphonic band, and the third director Eric (pseudonym) assists with pull out lessons. The bands sometimes performed together as one large concert band or in small pep-band groups or chamber groups. At the middle school, Eric was in charge while Samuel and Dirk taught pull out lessons

and small groups. The directors went to different elementary schools where they taught beginning band in 6th grade as a pull out class for 30-45 minutes. Later, they returned to the high school to teach marching band in the fall or jazz band the rest of the year.

Samuel constantly referred to leading the program at PHS as a team effort. During our discussion, he used the word "we" when referring to the teaching and decisions about the program. "We decided that marching band four days a week was going to be better," "We thought this would be better for the community," (interview, 2/26/18) etc. Samuel took pride in the 14% school participation in the band program and attributed some of that to the flexibility they allow the students. The marching band at PHS was optional and meets after school four days a week in the fall. Samuel, Eric and Dirk did not have a marching band when they opened the school and looked at what their families could afford, both money and timewise, and considered the requests and needs of the community before deciding that marching band four days a week after school was the right for their program. This way athletes and students who had activities could still be involved in the band program. They did a typical band camp in the summer and then the marching band met Tuesdays through Fridays after school. The marching band played at home football games as well as two marching band competitions. According to Samuel, having the volunteer marching band might be why their concert band numbers were so strong. Another source of pride for Samuel was the high amount of students in district and state honor bands. The students spent the fall working on fundamentals and learning the All-State and All-District audition etudes. Prairieland was well represented in the state honor band and usually occupied around 50% of the seats in the district honor bands.

The concert bands performed at several school events and pep-rallies as well as school concerts, solo and ensemble festival, district large group festival, and the state concert band championships. Prairieland High also had a pep-band that played at school events and small

chamber groups that went out and played “birthday grams” for students and teachers on their birthdays. This was both a fundraiser and a form of community engagement.

Samuel attributed much of his teaching and musical ability to his excellent middle school director that pushed him to take auditions and participate in certain honor groups. His experiences as a percussion instructor in college inspired him to pursue music education. In his first teaching position, Samuel had the privilege of team teaching with a high level musician who helped him develop as a director. The prospect of joining his colleague Eric to open the new school was exciting and he took it. They had only freshmen students the first year of the program, totaling around 40 students.

The band program has flourished with a high level of administrative support. When the school went to a block schedule, the administration knew the band program would want to see the students daily, so the band program was allowed to take two blocks on their schedule and meet every day. However, raising money for clinicians, music, trips and entry fees was a constant process for Prairieland High. Except for large instruments, PHS provided few school instruments and generally required students to purchase or rent their own so that there was financial investment from the families in the program. However, they do have the ability to assist some students who could not afford their own instrument. They charge a \$180 band fee that covers shirts, shoes and guest clinicians to come in and help. Prairieland was allocated a small budget from the district, but that usually covered busses and a few entry fees, but this funding was quickly depleted each year. A storage closet in the band room was filled with fundraising materials and the boosters worked concessions and events at a local concert venue. The band was able to earn money for out of state trips every other year.

Assessment was emphasized in the Prairieland band program. The directors wanted to build an efficient practice technique therefore they broke things down and gave assessments

regularly. Students were given realistic goals by breaking down a large assignment to small chunks. They also utilized a chair audition system to organize and motivate their students and also as a form of modeling music. The wind symphony at Prairieland participated regularly in the state band competition and has won a state championship.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE NATURE OF STUDENT INSTRUCTION

After sorting the data concerning instruction, several themes emerged. The first theme involved the consistency of instructional time in each program. They also had similar performance experiences including marching band, concert bands, jazz bands, and small ensembles. All of the programs participated in honor groups, marching festivals, two spring and one winter concert. The schools varied slightly in their participation in pep band and winter basketball events. All of the rehearsals observed were structured and efficient. Every rehearsal demonstrated established rehearsal routines, multiple methods of scaffolding, modeling, diagnosing, prescribing, checking for understanding, and delivering positive feedback. The final theme concerning the nature of instruction was the team atmosphere that was present in each program. This theme was often framed as a method of motivating students and one reason for the high rates of retention in the programs.

### **Consistency of Instructional Time**

In all three programs, the primary concert and marching groups met in the mornings five days a week. One program met during zero hour and first period year-round. Another met during zero hour and first period during marching season, and then the top band and the jazz band met for a shortened zero hour in the spring. The third program met every day for a double period on a block schedule (Table 1). All three schools also met for additional outside marching rehearsals.

Table 1.

*Instructional Time for Primary High School Band Class*

	Fall (Marching Season)	Winter/Spring (Concert Season)
Prairieland H.S.	80 minutes in school daily, 150 minutes after school marching band 4 days a week (optional)	80 minutes in school daily, Jazz Band after school 105 minutes 2 days a week (optional)
Eastbrook H.S.	105 minutes daily (zero hour and first period) + 120 minute marching rehearsal one night a week.	105 minutes daily (zero hour and first period) + sectionals one day a week
Meadowview H.S.	104 minutes daily (zero hour and first period) + 180 minute marching rehearsal one night a week + several required clinics.	75 minutes daily (25 minutes zero hour and first, Wind Symphony and Jazz Band only) + one sectional each week.

Source: Interviews with directors on (4/18/18, 4/11/18, and 4/11/18, and Band Handbook Artifacts)

As shown in Table 1, the instructional time was generally greater during the fall marching season, and all schools had at least one after school and evening component. One noticeable difference was that Prairieland did not require marching band, and all concert band rehearsals met during the school day. All three directors expressed occasionally using the evening time to split into groups and that they spent a lot of time learning the music in sectionals. One director expressed the importance of rehearsal time due to the low number of students that could afford private lessons. The expectation was that students practice and learn the music outside of class, but there was also a realization that this was not the case for most of their students.

I'm not a defeatist, I'm actually an optimist, but take the approach that we get everything done in class. You may assign something to practice and have three of eight clarinets complete the assignment but the other five that didn't negate the

work that they did. We introduce things in sectionals, and rehearse them together in class.<sup>2</sup> (Bobby, Interview 4/12/18)

All three directors acknowledged that the marching season is more rigorous in terms of co-curricular commitment, but that they tried not to ask for too much out of school time. One director went from having sectionals every day after school to one day a week to avoid getting burned out. Another told me that they kept to “the eight hour rule” (outside of school) that a nearby competitive music association mandates. They rehearsed one hour before school for zero hour and one three hour evening rehearsal. The third school encouraged families to plan appointments on Mondays because that was when they did not have marching band. Also included in two of the band handbooks were “absence request forms” that students needed to fill out and return to the director for approval to miss a rehearsal. This gave them some flexibility to excuse absences on a case by case basis, and also gave the students and families ample opportunities to communicate conflicts ahead of time.

### **Performance Experiences**

Performance experiences found were similar in all three programs. The primary ensembles were marching, concert, and jazz Bands. Two of the programs required marching band in the fall, and the third did not start with marching band, but added it later as a volunteer group after school. The marching bands at all three schools performed at four to six home football games, and marching band festivals. The amount of marching band festivals varied from two to five festival/contests a season, and all three schools march in at least one parade.

The concert groups at each school had different performance requirements varying by level. Eastbrook had one large concert band and a beginning band. Meadowview and Prairieland

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<sup>2</sup> During the observation at MHS, several students could be heard in practicing parts and having a sectional in the practice rooms before rehearsal. This suggests that there is a practicing culture present with some of the students.

each had a wind symphony and symphonic band that are divided by audition. At Eastbrook, Allison claimed that if her program grew over 80 students, that they would need to look into dividing into two bands. All three programs performed one school based concert in the fall and two in the spring (Table 2), participated in their district large group adjudication or music performance assessment, and at least one school regularly sends an ensemble to the state band contest.

Table 2.

*School Based Concert Band Concerts per school/ensemble.*

	Fall/Winter	Spring
Eastbrook	1	2
Prairieland	1	2
Meadowview	1 (Wind Symphony only)	2 (3 for Wind Symphony)

Source: Band Handbook Artifacts

A consistent element in all three programs was the implementation of solo, small ensembles, and chamber music. All three schools participated in their district solo and ensemble festival. Bobby at Meadowview expressed the importance of this element when they started a fall wind ensemble class.

...one of the best decisions we've ever made. We kind of make a wind ensemble class second period which is our offer to our more advanced students so they can get their musical needs more met than what marching band will give to them...In the fall, woodwinds and brass split into groups. mixed instrumentation and we will have performance Fridays....develops student leadership and musicianship...the kids teach each other, we coach a little but it's still the kids teaching each other first 9 weeks. (Bobby, interview 4/11/18)



Prairieland and Eastbrook had a similar small group experiences that pulled from their primary bands.

...so then we'll allow them to pick who they want to play with....we find pieces for them to be able to work up whether it's trios or quartets, whatever, strange combinations they come up with, and then we get them together in those small groups and they play for solo and ensemble....chamber groups for different gigs or performances that we get calls for. (Samuel, interview 4/11/18)

Eastbrook High School also had a school based chamber recital to feature solos and ensembles. In terms of solo repertoire, two of the schools spoke about utilizing their all-state audition etudes as individual performance goals and assessments. They assigned the scales and portions of the etudes as performance tests and gave students a grade in the fall. They also emphasized that students could use the material for district auditions as well as college entrance auditions. Participation in the district honor bands and the All-State Band was encouraged in the handbooks from all three schools.

The implementation of jazz band was slightly different at each school. One had it as a class during the day, one had two jazz bands after school divided by audition, and one had jazz band before school. Two of the schools attended jazz festivals in the spring, and one attended an additional jazz festival in the fall. Two schools also had pep bands that split off and performed at basketball games, but this was not consistent among the three programs.

### **Efficient Rehearsal Structure**

Another consistent theme concerning the instruction in all three band programs was the efficient use of student contact time. Little if any inefficient instruction or transition time was observed, and there was an easy flow to the instruction at each band rehearsal. Data from the transcriptions of the band rehearsals supported several recurring subthemes relating to

educational practice. These subthemes were: established routines, an emphasis on fundamentals, scaffolding, modeling, diagnosing, prescribing, checking for understanding, and positive reinforcement.

### **Established Routines**

Established classroom routines and expectations were observed with all three groups. In each of the observed groups, it took little effort for each director to begin rehearsal. All three rehearsals began with the director stepping on the podium and saying a one or two word instruction that was understood and interpreted by the students. One director said “6:30,” and turned on the metronome as a signal to start warm-ups. Another said “Tuning procedures,” and the students knew what to do. Verbiage was limited even more because of a coding system used their warm ups. Allison turned on the metronome, said “number one,” counted off, and the students began to play. Each director followed the warm up period with a short explanation of the goals they wanted to accomplish that day.

“We’re going to start off today with a full run through of the program since today is our concert, and then we’ll go back and touch on all the things.” (Allison, classroom observation, 4/19/18) “We’ll get a new section laid in with three of the new pieces.” (Samuel, Classroom Observation, 4/13/18) “Get your music out in this order.” (Bobby, classroom observation 4/12/18)

Meadowview used small tuners and had an established procedure for students to check intonation for both individual notes and chords with and without the tuners. Prairieland high school’s warm-up included an exercise played in different keys and a rhythmic articulation exercise that related to a challenge in the first piece that they rehearsed. Meadowview did a shortened warm up, but utilized a structured practice procedure in their rehearsal.

### **Emphasis on Fundamentals**

A strong sub-theme observed in the rehearsals and documented in the interviews was a strong emphasis on individual music fundamentals of sound, music literacy and student independence. The directors continually reinforced concepts of sound with their groups: “This is fortissimo...fortissimo air,” (Allison, classroom observation, 4/19/18). “Air, go,” (Bobby, classroom observation 4/12/18). “You have to firm up and blow fast air,” (Allison, classroom observation, 4/18/18). “That’s it, let’s get a better sound, a better core to your sound,” (Bobby, classroom observation 4/12/18). “I’m still getting inconsistent pitch on the lower note because it’s not supported with consistent air” (Allison, classroom observation, 4/18/18).

Each director also discussed the priority of student independence and individual student musicianship. Bobby articulated that this was the expectation not only for his group, but the other directors at the middle schools and in the high school program.

They are all to focus on a good portion of the rehearsal maybe 20-30% of the rehearsal on fundamental development, scales, arpeggios, slurs, tuning, listening exercises.....we don’t teach notes, we teach fundamentals and the music comes to them a lot faster, but fundamentals, fundamental development is an utmost priority as they develop the kids. (Bobby, interview 2/29/18)

The MHS students are assessed on scales and arpeggios every day, sight reading test every week, four major sight reading tests, and scale tests every semester graded by the whole seven person band staff. Bobby keeps a spreadsheet of the scores for all of the students in the program. High school students must play the all state music four times as well as the chromatic scale, and there is also one etude test per week.

Samuel had a similar process at Prairieland High.

I try to have a tests quite often... it gives them a reason to practice...we will break it down, you know so 'you're going to have a test over these four measures, this week, next week we're going to do the next four measures or whatever. (Samuel, interview 4/13/18)

At Prairieland the bands were divided up, based primarily on these skills. "Symphonic Band is a place for them to develop certain musical skills ....wind symphony is a place to move beyond those base level skills." (Samuel, interview 4/11/18) Tying into fundamentals, each director talked about the emphasis on individual musicianship and skills. Allison had the goal for her students to "...have the ability to get a piece of music and be able to decode and learn it themselves so that they have self-functional skills." (Allison, interview 4/18/18) Bobby saw the students' technical development as a pathway to more advanced music.

The kids need to be able to play their instrument well and their training on their instrument fundamentally needs to be good, ....kids can't handle the music or they're not advanced on their instrument their training and development is not there, then you'll probably have to put tiddlywinks in front of them all the time. (Bobby, interview 4/11/18)

In the Meadowview band the students learned much of the music through structured practice.

This individual time helps us out a lot. It's chaotic, but it allows them to go right to the spots that need the most work. It really gets the horn on their face and they're always playing. This is how we learn a lot of music, I give them a section like A to B and give them a few minutes with the metronome on to practice and learn it before we try to play it together. (Bobby, follow up interview, 4/12/18)

### **Scaffolding**

The majority of time in the observed rehearsal was utilized to rehearse music for upcoming concerts. Several scaffolding techniques were observed. Two directors had students play with the metronome to hear and develop a strong sense of internal pulse before taking the metronome away. Some band directors had students play, sing or sizzle their parts while the director was snapping or clapping as well as mastering difficult passages first under-tempo. Meadowview also used tuners as tools to scaffold building and tuning of chords.

Ok, now put it right on the zero and hold it steady, don't let it wiggle, right on the zero, and hold it steady, none of this kind of wiggling stuff. Ready set go.....turn your stands around. No tuner, I want you to achieve that sound without the tuner.

(Bobby, rehearsal observation, 4/12/18)

Allison had the expectation that the Eastbrook kids “air band” their parts while she was rehearsing with a different section, and Samuel also used the “air band” technique to review a piece of music before playing it on their instruments.

### **Modeling**

Another consistent sub-theme was modeling for students. Often the directors would use their voice to model for the students how the music should sound. This was usually accompanied by a verbal explanation of how the students should play something. “Yeah there still needs to be a little life on the downbeat... (sings).....But you are going woo-haa, you are not articulating the second grace note you have to go tee-ya tee-ya” (Allison, rehearsal observation 4/19/18) “Let me hear trombone and first trumpets (sings) I need to hear contrast in that line. (sings) two, ready and ” (Samuel, rehearsal observation 4/13/18)

Singing was used both to model how something should be played and to identify a certain spot in the music. “triplet folks who come down (sings)...Start the first note stronger (sings)”

(Samuel, rehearsal observation, 4/13/18) Two of the teachers asked a student or section to model for the others and articulate how a passage should be played. “

Can I have first chairs play with me? Everybody else air band ....Ok can I have first and second chairs from 182..Add one person..Add one person ready go....Ok, faster now because we're 20 clicks under tempo. (Samuel, rehearsal observation 4/13/18)

### **Diagnosing and Prescribing**

When the directors did use verbal instruction, it was usually in a process of diagnosing a problem and prescribing what the students should do differently. The majority of rehearsal time was a cycle of students playing a section, the director diagnosing a problem, prescribing a solution and then students would play again. Feedback was direct and usually in one to two sentences. “Make it in time, every dotted half note tied to a dotted quarter must sustain with energy.” (Bobby, rehearsal observation 4/12/18)“Yeah, the ba-ba part is just ever so slightly out of time which is making us rhythmically inconsistent.” (Allison, rehearsal observation 4/19/18)

Euphoniums can you match the horns better at 136? I want you to blend with the horns. I don't want to hear you separately. It should drop right out....back to the chorale section (sings) you need to blend a little bit better there. Same thing 1, 2, ready go (claps) (Allison, rehearsal observation 4/19/18)

### **Checking for Understanding**

When the students made a correction, directors used questioning techniques to check for understanding. They often led the students to the answer rather than waiting for a response. “Are your notes longer or shorter than what the clarinets play? ..Longer. Can you match what they play?...Do you hear how that takes awhile to settle in?” (Allison, rehearsal observation 4/19/18)

“You guys notice you’re slowing down, speeding up? Every time I turn the met you guys have to recover. Right?” (Bobby, rehearsal observation 4/12/18)

### **Positive Reinforcement**

Positive reinforcement was also used in all three rehearsals. When directors gave positive reinforcement it was genuine, directly related to the music, and usually acknowledged that the students still had room for improvement. “Thank you for making that adjustment and thank you for doing it immediately that was quite nice.” (Bobby, rehearsal observation, 4/19/18)

“You guys played it excellent at 9 but you totally changed styles at 17” (Allison, rehearsal observation, 4/12/18) “Winds that chorale section sounds so much better, So much better. That work you’ve done on it this week has really paid off.” (Allison, rehearsal observation, 4/12/18)

“Good choices, thanks for making good choices.” (Samuel, rehearsal observation, 4/13/18)

The three rehearsals observed had a similar pacing and format. Each group was preparing music for an upcoming concert, so they did a short warm up before rehearsing the pieces. They had clearly established routines, emphasis on fundamentals, scaffolding, modeling, diagnosing, prescribing, and checking for understanding and positive reinforcement. These characteristics contributed to a fast paced rehearsal where the students spent much of the time playing on their instruments rather than listening to the director talk.

### **Team Atmosphere**

The third theme that emerged from interviews and artifacts was the promotion of a family or team atmosphere. In these band programs, this was used as a method to create culture and motivate the students. While this aspect related to more than the nature of instruction, it seemed an important factor for engaging students in rehearsals and performances associated with the band program. The band directors constantly referred to their programs as *teams* or *families*.

I use the word ‘Band Fam’ a lot because we’re just like ‘we’re a family and we’re here to work together and made to rely on each other. And So the expectation is that you’re a responsible member and I tell the kids that ‘I don’t care if you like each other, but you better be respectful and supportive of everybody all the time and this is inside and outside of class. (Allison, interview 4/18/18)

Directors expressed that their students enjoyed being part of a successful group. Additionally, students were motivated to work hard because they did not want to let down the rest of the group. Allison said that this attitude helped students self-regulate when another student missed a rehearsal.

A lot of them show up and work really hard and so if they’re showing up and working really hard and they see a kid that was absent for zero hour later in the day they’ll be like ‘Dude where were you today? That’s super not cool (Allison, interview, 4/18/18)

Allison emphasized that reminders about rehearsal expectations were much more effective coming from their peers in the group rather from the director calling the parents. At MHS, Bobby let the students know the importance of working hard and showing up because they were a part of a team. He encouraged a unified group mentality. He reminded his students about the importance of consistent attendance in the rehearsal and keeping their other academic grades in good standing, and that failing to do these things would let the team down.

Another observation that contributed to a team atmosphere involved students in decision-making and soliciting student input in the rehearsal process. Samuel would often encourage students to converse within their sections to solve musical problems such as balance within the section and intonation. “So, this note is super nasty, so let’s have an intonation conversation....so, if you’re finding that you’re super out of tune or super airy, take it down an octave...Good choices, thanks



for making good choices.” (Samuel, observation 4/13/18) The MHS band took a vote on whether they would cut out a movement of Hindemith’s *Symphonic Metamorphosis* from their upcoming recording session because of the short amount of time they had to prepare it. Bobby had told me that he was planning on cutting it from the session, but during the rehearsal he had the students play it and then take a vote. He could have easily told the students what to do, but having them vote gave the students additional ownership of the decision. He also acknowledged that he admired so many students wanting to put in the extra effort to add the piece. After a concert run through with the EHS Band, Allison solicited input from the students on which piece they thought needed the most work. Utilizing a technique where the students held up numbers rather than shouting out an answer empowered every student to participate and allowed her to collect feedback on the students’ general understanding of the concert music.

### **High, Consistent Expectations of Students**

Aside from the team atmosphere, the efficiency of the rehearsal, consistent student contact time, and performance experiences, all three programs held consistently high expectations of the students. This was apparent from their interviews: “So part of our culture here in my program is that we are very high achieving with very high standards...” (Allison, interview, 4/18/18) “If they want a spot in the show and if they want to keep a spot in the show, they know to be there, or even if they want to remain in band class. There’s expectations academically as well.” (Bobby, interview, 4/11/18)

Directors were also enforcing high expectations consistently in class as well, and there were a few instances of redirection. “There were still people who came in this morning and were in a practice room 5 minutes before class started, and that’s not what the evaluation is about. The evaluation is all about how do you practice.” (Samuel, observation, 4/13/18) “It’s not screw

around time guys.” (Allison, observation, 4/19/18) “Saxophones can we sit taller with our backs off the chairs better? Everyone’s just kind of bleh.” (Bobby, observation, 4/12/18)

### **Summary of the Nature of Instruction**

Eastbrook, Meadowview, and Prairieland band programs had much in common concerning the nature of instruction. All three groups had a consistent rehearsal time in the morning, five days a week. All three groups had a co-curricular component, either a zero hour meeting, after school sectionals, and/or weekly evening rehearsals. PHS was slightly different in the fact that marching band was extra-curricular and not a requirement. The performance offerings were also similar. All three schools had marching bands, concert bands, jazz bands, honor band auditions, and solo and ensemble, and chamber music.

The observations revealed each program had rehearsals that operated with efficiency incorporating established routines, and emphasis on fundamentals, scaffolding, modeling, diagnosing and prescribing, checking for understanding, and constructive feedback. Directors articulated in their interviews about their attempts to foster a team atmosphere and a culture of high expectations and student involvement. All of these factors likely contributed to the high achieving results of their students.

## **CHAPTER SIX: THE TEACHERS RESPONSIBLE FOR INSTRUCTION**

Each of the three high school band programs in this study were taught by head directors primarily associated with the high school program, but who also assisted or oversaw the middle schools and/or elementary schools that fed into their high school. All schools had similar strategies for parent communication and valued the development of non-musical skills in their band ensembles. Additionally, each program had two or more licensed band directors based primarily at other schools that team taught or assisted at the high school. There was also evidence of all three programs bringing in guest clinicians and nurturing a culture of student leadership.

### **Qualities of the Directors**

The head directors at PHS, EHS, and MHS were all licensed teachers with degrees in music education. One had obtained an advanced degree, but each of them had over six years of experience teaching and had been at their current school for at least six years. Two out of three had been at their current school their whole teaching career. All three directors participated in band programs throughout middle school and high school. Their teaching experience ranged from six to twenty three years. Evidence supported themes of a high level of musicianship and preparation, pride in their work, positive student rapport, strong mentorship in their past, and awareness of community values.

### **High Level Musicianship**

Rehearsal observations revealed examples of a high level of musicianship. Examples of this were score preparation as well as the ability to hear inaccuracies in pitch, intonation, rhythm, balance, and phrasing. While rehearsing repertoire near the beginning of the class, Allison conducted from memory without looking at the score and was still able to mouth subdivisions as well as take notes for future rehearsal. During rehearsal all three teachers planned specific macro

goals to accomplish, but were able to adjust to the needs of the group. The pace of the rehearsal was guided by their knowledge of the music, ability to hear inaccuracies, and their vision for musical excellence. This was done instead of a specific, scripted plan of what to address. Bobby spoke about how he did not like to use the full wind symphony rehearsal to split up into groups with other directors because he did not want to confuse the students with different interpretations of the music. “I do study on my music that an assistant would not, so stylistically so I don’t want an assistant to teach something different and then break bad habits.” (Bobby, follow up interview, 4/12/18) “This is not a heavy movement, you don’t have to tongue heavy, it’s not about volume, it’s about accuracy.” (Bobby, rehearsal transcription, 2/11/18) Allison gave specific explanations of how she wanted the music to sound.

Unlike the middle of Lannigan’s where I want weight in the middle of the note, I want weight here at the top of the note (sings). A little bit of a harder T at the beginning of the note. Same thing. (Allison, rehearsal observation 4/19/18)

There was also evidence that directors were able to hear specific pitch inaccuracies and were able to give specific feedback relating to instrumental techniques. “Do you hear the G and E out of tune? Can you check it on your tuners? Where are you at on those? Check. (sings)” (Bobby, rehearsal observation, 4/12/18) “When you’re going up in register. What is happening to your pitch?....Flat, you’re going really, really flat. Firm up your embouchure and fast air. One two alto go.” (Allison, rehearsal observation, 4/19/18) “So this note is super nasty so let’s have an intonation conversation.” (Samuel, rehearsal observation, 4/13/18)

### **Pride in their Position**

In addition to the musical skills listed above, there was evidence that the directors took pride in their position as the band director and the program that they built. Each director seemed

to love teaching at their school. Allison enjoyed getting to know the EHS band while completing her teaching licensure and later demanded of her advisors that she student teach at Eastbrook.

I said “I want to student teach at Eastbrook,” and they were like “oh but you should be at Mountain Mesa School (pseudonym),” I was like “I know what that program looks like, I’ve been in that program. I want to student teach at Eastbrook. I’m student teaching at Eastbrook I’m not really asking, I’m telling you.” (Allison, interview, 4/18/18)

She was thrilled to take over the EHS band program the following year. In her band handbook, she stated how much she loved working at that school. Samuel talked about how he was proud to involve such a large portion of the school in the band program, and having a large amount of students win chairs in the regional and state honor ensembles. He was also happy with the support that his administration has provided in terms of scheduling, and working closely with two other colleagues in the band program.

When Bobby was hired as the assistant director at the MHS twenty three years ago, he thought he would be there for one year, and after a short stint at the middle school, he has been the head high school director for eighteen years. He also takes pride that they have such a high achieving program under challenging circumstances socioeconomically. “They can achieve, you just need to think creatively. I can’t teach them the same way as Mountain Mesa School (pseudonym) or Foothills Academy (pseudonym).” (Bobby, follow up interview, 4/12/18)

All three directors also showed signs of having positive student rapport. In class, Bobby made jokes, but he also emphasized that their trust of him and relationship contributed to being able to play such sophisticated literature. Allison’s students were incredibly obedient and respectful of her and they seemed to take great pride in what they were doing. Samuel had

students meeting with him before and after class to catch up on things that they had missed and spoke with a student about accommodating other activities that the student was involved in.

### **Mentorship**

The three teachers all talked of the importance of past mentorship. Samuel discussed how his middle school director had pushed him to be a better musician and to audition for honor groups. As a young teacher his first teaching assignment involved team teaching with a fantastic musician who taught him a lot about music and ear training. Allison acculturated to the Eastbrook community, learning from her student teaching experience at EHS before taking over the program. Bobby also discussed his student teaching experience in a low socioeconomic setting, and how it influenced the way he approached instruction at MHS. This mentor teacher shared with him that many students in low socioeconomic settings have difficulties practicing outside of class and generally did not practice. However, the mentor emphasized that students with low socioeconomic status can achieve if the director is creative in how they teach and gives the students ample time to learn what they need to in class or rehearsal. The director and students must have a positive attitude and remove the word “can’t” from their vocabulary.

### **Understanding the Community**

During our discussions, other qualities found in each director were excellent parent communication, positive community understanding, appropriate program adaption, and valuing non-musical skills. EHS, Allison struggled with attendance and transportation and she confronted it by setting up carpools and connecting with students with attendance issues. If she struggled with a student, she also had support from an assistant principal responsible for attendance. Many of her students were in sports, had jobs, or home responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings. She was supportive of these other needs, however, expectations for rehearsals and performance are made clear in her handbook and she emphasized the need for

communication. An absence request page was in her handbook and she requested that students contact her immediately if they expect to miss something at the last minute. Allison said that many of her students have rough home lives and some have never before had an adult hold them accountable. However, in her band program, they get structure and accountability.

Samuel understood that PHS was a relatively small community and believed that having marching band as an optional ensemble may have contributed to why their concert band numbers were so strong. Prairieland had a high Hispanic and Mexican population, so when small ensembles performed “birthday grams,” they learn both *Happy Birthday* and *Las Mananitas*. The directors at Prairieland learned about their community and decided that marching band would be effective if rehearsed four days a week.

Bobby told me how he engaged the community by once performing a marching show inspired by Mexican and Native American themes. He told me how the show had “the Grito” in it, (a call and response chant that originated in the fight for Mexican independence from Spain; Vigil, 1998), and the crowd was doing “the Grito” back at the band.

In accordance with many of the community values, Allison, Samuel, and Bobby recognized that sometimes non-musical skills like hard work, perseverance, teamwork, and punctuality would be the most important to their students after high school. Bobby emphasized that parents saw how the students are pushed to work hard. That expectation of hard work and the culture developed was relevant to the needs of the community after students completed high school. Allison and Samuel echoed the emphasis on non-musical skills:

I know that there are people that will probably disagree with this, but the majority of what I really focus on for these kids, that I think is gonna be most beneficial to them when they leave, is the non-musical stuff.... more legitimate life skills that

are actually gonna help them....these kids aren't going to go be music majors. It's just not in the purview of their lives and that's fine. (Allison, interview, 4/18/18)

It's a conversation about 'look you know some of you will go on to play music and some of you are not going to go on to play music, and for those of you who don't go on to play music, I hope that you are changing the world, and I hope that one day you are able to excel and succeed in whatever path you pick. You know, if you're going to be a scientist or you're going to be a doctor I hope that your ability to focus and your dedication one day saves somebody's life because that was a skill that you learned or at least practiced in this ensemble. (Samuel, interview, 4/11/18)

Since most of Allison's students played on school owned instruments, she expressed concern for their ability to participate in music after high school. If they play their instrument in college, they must check out a school-owned instrument and these are not always available at every institution. Additionally, she expressed apprehension for the large refugee student population. These students and others who were not American citizens cannot get financial aid and must pay full out of state tuition, which is prohibitive even for most middle class families.

Parent communication was also key in displaying community awareness and connection. All three schools used the *Remind* app to send messages to parents and students and managed a Facebook page for the program and a Facebook page for the booster program. However, email was emphasized as the primary form of communication. Allison's booster president would send monthly emails, maybe more during marching season, regarding updates and needs of the band. PHS and EHS had a band and a parent Facebook page that were regularly updated. MHS set their



summer calendar dates in January and sent communication to both the middle and high school parents.

### **Summary of the Qualities of the Directors**

Similar themes emerged regarding the head directors for each program. Each was engaged in the community through parent communication, and an understanding of community values. One primary value echoed in all three communities was the importance of skills such as work ethic and punctuality. Allison, Bobby, and Samuel also had in common at least one strong mentor in their past that helped hone their pedagogical skills and understanding of how to adapt their program to their community. Evidence of a positive student rapport, a sense of pride in their position, examples of outstanding musicianship and preparation was also observed.

### **Team Teaching and Vertical Alignment**

Team teaching and vertical alignment were the strongest supported themes across all three programs concerning the persons responsible for instruction. At EHS, Allison expressed that she was excited to have directors at the middle schools willing to help with marching band camp and zero hour. She attributed the growth in EHS band enrollment during the last five years due to her outreach efforts at the middle schools. She noticed that students were more likely to sign up for her high school program because they knew her. She also had less underprepared students enrolling in the high school program. In previous years, Allison noticed students were unprepared in terms of music fundamentals and literacy. In some ways, Allison pondered if the high school beginning band class would remain necessary.

At MHS, Bobby was grateful to be in a vertically aligned district with all middle schools feeding into one high school and supportive of team-teaching. Each of the seven directors involved in the program had a primary position, but also assisted or oversaw the students at other stages. Each of the three middle schools, the freshman center, and high school had a director.

Additionally there was an assistant high school director, a percussion instructor for the district, and a music education coordinator that oversaw all band, choir, and general music programs. The band directors were all involved in the marching band at the high school during the morning rehearsals as well as auditions and assessment. In the afternoons, the high school directors assisted at the middle schools and the freshmen academy. They also had a percussion that co-taught at the high school and all of the middle schools. The directors met once a week in a *professional learning community* with the music coordinator where they brought in recordings of their band, scores and listened and give each other feedback. The directors also aligned rehearsal expectations so that the students knew what to expect as they moved through schools.

In Prairieland, Samuel and two other band directors built a program from scratch when the school first opened. Samuel was grateful for the opportunity to work closely everyday with the two other directors. Samuel and the assistant high school director directed two concert bands while the middle school director did pull out lessons and sectionals. Later they went to the middle school where the two high school directors assisted with sectionals and pull out lessons. Each director taught one or two elementary band programs in the afternoon that began in sixth grade and met every day before returning to the high school to teach marching band or one of the two jazz bands. Table 3 outlines the responsibilities of all of the certified band specialists who taught at these three schools.

Table 3.

*Certified band staff and responsibilities*

High School Program	Job Title	Band responsibilities
Eastbrook High School	High School Director	HS marching band, concert band, jazz band, steel drum ensemble, HS beginning band, assists at middle schools 3-4 hours a week.

	Middle School Director*	6th-8th bands and assist for zero hour and marching band camp at HS. *(paid by band boosters)
	Middle School Director*	6th-8th bands and assist for zero hour and marching band camp at HS. *(paid by band boosters)
Meadowview High School	Head High School director	Marching band, wind symphony, assists at the middle schools, oversees the band program.
	Assistant High School director	Assistant director teaches jazz band symphonic band, assists at middle schools
	Percussion Assistant	Percussion instruction for the high school, middle school, and freshman center, percussion, electronics and props for marching band.
	Freshmen director	(2) 9th grade bands, assists at high school with marching band and middle schools
	Middle School Director	6-8th bands, assists at high school with marching band and assessment
	Middle School Director	6-8th bands, assists at high school with marching band and assessment
	Middle School Director	6-8th bands, assists at high school with marching band and assessment
Prairieland High School	Head High School Director	Wind symphony, marching band, jazz band 1, assists at the middle school, 6th grade (elementary) band.
	Assistant High School	Symphonic band, marching

	Director	band, jazz band 2, assists at the middle school, 6th grade (elementary) band
	Middle School Director	7th and 8th grade bands, marching band, assists with wind symphony and symphonic band, 6th grade (elementary) bands

Source: (Allison, Bobby, and Samuel interviews, 4/18/18, 4/11/18)

All of the directors talked about the importance of team teaching. Team teaching helped them establish a vertically aligned curriculum and recruit students to their high school band. It also helped to set expectations regarding knowledge and skills for the students to be successful in their ensembles.

### **Student Leadership**

There was data to support that each program utilized student leadership as a form of instruction, modeling and program organization. Allison spoke the most about relying on her student section leaders and upper-classmen to assist in instruction. “I rely on student leadership a lot...The kids who have good leadership skills and good music skills, they run sectionals...and they give kids private lessons all the time...they are responsible for running things a lot.”

(Allison, interview 4/18/18)

This reliance on student leadership may be because Eastbrook had the fewest amount of certified directors that were able to regularly help out at the high school (Table 3). Allison and Bobby also talked about how having a leadership structure helped instill and enforce expectations in younger members. In the Meadowview band, students must understand that in order to move into officer positions they need to show punctuality, preparation and resilience as well as leadership skills. In the Prairieland, the first chairs were commonly used and expected to

model parts and playing for the other members in their section. They also have a point system where students can earn letters and bars for extra responsibilities and leadership skills.

### **Guest Clinicians and Other Staff**

All three programs also had some additional instructors or guest clinicians that volunteered or were hired to further develop their students' musical performance. At Eastbrook students were involved in one-on-one lessons with college music students. While this program was exciting, Allison expressed concern at the lack of resources for marching band "techs", and having to teach colorguard and percussion for the marching band by herself.

Meadowview band had four clinics in their schedule with a retired college band director. In rehearsal the director spoke about a clinic happening the following week with a different college band director. In the Prairieland band handbook, working with clinicians was specifically cited as a form of preparation for the all-state auditions. These clinicians added extra cost for the program and Samuel spoke about fundraising so they could offset the cost for these clinicians to come help. During the Prairieland rehearsal, a local college professor was announced as coming soon into the classroom to work with some of the students. Additionally, Samuel mentioned that a colorguard instructor for the marching band was hired and paid for by the band boosters. All three programs utilized other instructors and resources to supplement the instruction of full time teachers.

### **Summary of the Teachers Responsible for Instruction**

The people responsible for instruction were incredibly important in the vision for excellence, planning, and instruction at EHS, PHS, and MHS. The programs are all led by licensed teachers with years of experience, outstanding musicianship, preparation, a sense of pride and belonging in their position, a positive rapport with their students, strong past mentorship and an awareness of their communities' values. Several efficient forms of parent

communication were utilized, and all of the directors had a similar understanding of how the skills such as work ethic and punctuality taught in their band ensembles were the most relevant values to their communities.

One of the most supported themes was evidence of team teaching and vertical alignment in each district. Samuel, Bobby, and Allison were all involved in the teaching at their middle school feeder programs as well as in some cases, the elementary school programs. They expressed gratitude for the good relationships they maintained with the middle school directors and their assistance with the high school programs. These teachers actively developed relationships with the middle school students before they registered at their high school. Student leadership, visiting college professors and lesson teachers were also utilized.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: PROGRAM FUNDING AND SUPPORT

Eastbrook, Meadowview, and Prairieland had varying levels of administrative support in different areas. Administrative support included providing salaries for multiple band directors, support of team teaching and vertical alignment, scheduling for consistent instructional time, and in some cases, a small budget for transportation, and supplies. All three directors spoke about their student fee structure and how they were conscious not to charge high fees, but felt that students and families in the band needed to have some financial investment in the program. Limited school instruments were provided in all three programs, but students often purchased their own mouthpieces and reeds. Prairieland required that most students purchase or rent their own instruments. All three of the directors spoke about the necessity of their parent booster programs and the fundraising that came from them. The programs also had similar fundraisers that included selling concessions, raffles, and a march-a thon.

### **Administrative Support**

Though not all of the directors spoke about district support directly, all of the programs were supported by having several full-time band positions and having at least one full time band director at each school. All of the directors mentioned in Table 2 above were licensed teachers employed by the school district. Meadowview seemed to have the highest level of administrative support for the amount of band directors employed and their ability to meet together and coordinate. At Eastbrook, Allison was able to schedule time in the afternoons at the middle schools. Samuel also had administrative support to align his schedule with the other two directors so that they could co-teach at the middle school and high school. Team teaching seemed to be valued in all three school districts, though Allison mentioned that she did not understand why more high school directors in her district did not do it. This support for team

teaching and collaboration allowed Allison, Bobby, and Samuel to communicate with middle school directors and organize a system of vertical alignment.

Allison had many of her EHS band concerts in conjunction with the middle schools so that the middle school band students could hear and see the high school band. At MHS, all seven directors were involved in the marching band in the fall and the assessment and audition process in November and December. They also had the support of a music coordinator that was involved in overseeing the band program. At PHS all three directors had roles in the marching band, worked with all students in the program 7-12, and begin instruction in the 6th grade at the elementary school.

After seeing the rehearsal schedules, I noticed that all schools were able to meet in the morning for a long, consistent amounts of time. This might have been a sign of administrative support regarding scheduling and student contact time. The morning rehearsal time gave all involved the opportunity to team teach at different levels in the program later in the day. Only one program mentioned having some difficulties with scheduling. Samuel said that at PHS they had a new person working on their master schedule and they had placed another single period class against one of their morning band blocks. Because of this, a number of students had to miss rehearsal every other day. He said it had been a struggle for morale and he hoped they could resolve it the following year.

All three programs also provided at least some school instruments, music, and supplies. However, Allison and Samuel talked about having to provide a lot through their booster programs. At Meadowview they were able to use some of their district Title I technology funds to purchase thirty iPads with music assessment software for the band program. The handbooks talked about how the marching uniforms and part of the concert uniform were provided by the school district. Eastbrook had recently purchased new uniforms. All of the programs provided



large school instruments and none of them mentioned a fee for instrument use. At Prairieland and possibly the other two schools, students provided their own smaller instruments. Allison mentioned her district has some mill levy money that she could use, but only for the purchase of new instruments, and she was allocated a small repair budget for school instruments. Every handbook mentioned that students were required to replace or repair any damages to instruments that they caused. Marching band uniforms and parts of concert band uniforms were provided as well, but the directors did not mention whether these were purchased by the school or the band boosters or both.

The amount of monetary support in terms of budget varied from district to district. EHS was given transportation to home football games, but all other monetary support had to be fundraised. PHS was originally given a budget for entry fees and transportation, but according to Samuel, the district had stopped paying for transportation and the budget for entry fees had shrunk. Their budget was used up quickly paying for entry fees for district and all-state band festivals. Occasionally the district would provide a bus for certain pep band and other events. At MHS, Bobby mentioned the iPads through the technology fund and praised his district for supporting them so that they can keep the fees low and make public education truly free.

### **Financial Investment by the Students**

All three programs required some financial investment by the students and families. The fees ranged from \$95 to \$180 and usually included one or more shirts, gloves for the marching uniform, and in some cases uniform cleaning. The fee structures also varied slightly. MHS had a \$95 uniform fee for freshmen and a \$135 for tenth through twelfth graders in wind symphony because they also use school tuxedos in the spring. EHS had a flat yearly fee of \$125, but allowed students to waive up to \$100 of it by filling out a scholarship form and expressing financial need. Students that had scholarship forms were expected to help out at fundraisers, the

philosophy being that every student should have some amount of financial “buy in” to the program. PHS had a \$180 band fee, but students could get a discount if they paid it all at once by a certain deadline. Handbooks also stated that students were required to purchase \$40 marching shoes. All three directors expressed that they felt their fees were low compared to other schools. “If I charged fees what some programs do even in (this state) I’d have a band of about half.” (Bobby, interview 4/11/18) Samuel and Allison had similar situations.

We do require a fee for marching, well for being in band period. The band fee and it’s \$180 and....we look at that 180 and compare it to other programs that are you know in the couple of thousand dollar range and we know we’re sitting quite low with that. (Samuel, interview 4/11/18)

I do charge student fees, they’re very small it’s \$125 band fee and I would say about 30% of the students pay it. I will waive all the way up to \$25 because I think there’s a certain amount of, you know, quote unquote “buy in” that needs to happen and we provide a lot of fundraising for the kids. (Allison, interview 4/18/18)

The fees paid for a variety of things such as the uniforms and instruments and some programs needed the fees to purchase sheet music, accessories and pay for festivals and entry fees. The subtheme of *financial investment* was evidenced in all programs. All three programs provided large instruments and some small instruments, but the students were encouraged to purchase their own. Prairieland did not provide any small instruments because they wanted the parents and families to have investment in their students’ musical education. There was an understanding that this might exclude some students, but the directors felt that the expectation of investment was worth it, and that they would find a way to help out students who struggled. He

also said that they sometimes did repairs on student owned instruments if they could not afford it and sometimes they could help get a student's instrument fixed. The handbook for Meadowview High School stated that students may be required to purchase a mouthpiece to use on their school-owned instrument, and also that the students may need to purchase method and technique books.

Only two of the schools mentioned trips with their programs. MHS said that they were careful with what trips they took and that they tried to make them affordable and keep the price down. Bobby expressed that their last trip cost about \$450 a student and that many students were able to fundraise raise most of that. PHS said that they planned a trip every two years alternating from a closer, cheaper trip to a bigger expensive trip. Those came with additional price tags. The students had many individual fundraisers such as candy bars and jerky to help raise money, but Samuel admitted that the trip was not a reality for all of their students.

### **Booster Programs**

There was evidence for parent booster clubs at all three schools that helped out with communication, fundraising, and other tasks. Allison talked about how they commonly helped with snacks or setting up student carpools before and after events. The booster president was also commonly tasked with sending newsletters, managing a Facebook page and assisting with communication. According to the handbooks, boosters met anywhere from six to eight times a year and assisted in communication and setting up fundraisers.

We do the individual type of sales...like candy bars or jerky or we do those kind of fundraisers so individuals can do that. ....program type of fundraisers...the Jazz band last couple of years we've done like a Jazz and a meal type of thing...We do group kind of fundraisers like that. (Samuel, interview 2/26/18)

Eastbrook had similar fundraising opportunities.

We do a march a thon... we usually get a couple grand for that...Barnes and Noble fundraiser where on a certain day we get a certain percentage of the profits...other smaller fundraiser stuff that are for students that need help raising their band fees and the expectation is that if you have a scholarship request in then you participate in these events because ... you need to show me that you are putting some sort of effort in. (Allison, interview 4/18/18)

Meadowview tried to have fundraisers that would be relevant to the community and would bring in the most money for the students.

We have three fundraisers set up for them, March a thon and then.. raffle a car off, and then our biggest fundraiser believe it or not or close to it is that we raffle off four sides of beef...three fundraisers that are 100% profit for the kids, we work to get it so our fundraisers are 100% profit for the kids. (Bobby, interview 4/11/18)

Each band program seemed to have larger “full program” fundraisers to help cover music, supplies, and transportation costs and one also did smaller “individual” fundraisers that helped students cover their band fees or trip costs.

### **Summary of Program Funding and Support**

Regarding consistent student contact time and scheduling, all three of the programs studied had some administrative support. Team teaching was supported in all three schools, however, at EHS, it was the band boosters that paid the middle school directors to work with the high school band outside of their contract time. At PHS and MHS team teaching was built into the teachers’ schedules. Support for supplies varied. Allison expressed not getting any supply money from her school, and only transportation to the shared citywide stadium home for football games. Samuel said he only got a little supply money that ended up going to entry fees, and that they needed to pay for most of their own transportation. Bobby did not mention these funding

areas directly, but implied that his district was supportive in terms of funding, but that they still needed to fundraise.

Aside from financial support from the district, all three programs required some sort of student fee. This fee covers shirts, gloves, a uniform fee, and in some cases other supplies and music for the program. All of the participating directors talked about or implied in their handbook that they wanted the students to have a financial investment in their music education whether it be purchasing their own instrument, purchasing a mouthpiece, or paying some or all of the band fee. Parent booster programs were found at each school and assisted with individual and program fundraisers as well as communication and other tasks.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: REVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

Three programs were purposefully chosen among suggestions by experienced university faculty to exemplify high achievement in high school band in a low socioeconomic setting. In order to discover themes that may have implications for best practices, the directors of the programs were interviewed, a class was observed, and artifacts such as band handbooks, syllabus, and performance calendars were collected. The transcripts of the interviews, handbooks, syllabus, and observation *t charts* were coded using the *in vivo* method (Saldaña 2009) to find evidence relating to the nature of student instruction, characteristics of those responsible for instruction, and evidence of program funding and support. Rehearsal transcriptions were coded using the *process* method (Saldaña 2009) for examples of instructional best practices. Data was grouped according to the nature of student instruction, characteristics of those responsible for instruction, and evidence of program funding and support, and then grouped within each area into themes. Similarities between these exemplary programs suggest some best practices for teaching high school band in low socioeconomic settings.

Data from the interviews, handbooks, and rehearsal observations revealed that each program had mostly consistent ensemble offerings with the exception of one school offering a steel drum ensemble. The rehearsals and instruction moved in a similar format with some uniqueness to each program in the use of a metronome and the way each director counted in the group. The musical goals of each rehearsal observed were also slightly different. This might be attributed to the proximity each observed rehearsal had to the next performance. Programs varied in the amount of certified teachers involved in the program as well as out of town trips taken. There was also a slight difference in the amount of marching band contests attended and whether or not marching band participation was mandatory in the band program.

Each director showed examples of musical preparation, and ability to hear and give feedback regarding pitch, rhythm, tempo, balance, articulation, intonation, and phrasing. They all also mentioned at least one past mentor that had helped them develop as teachers. There was a slight variance in the amount of monetary support by each district with one covering busses for home football and small repairs, and one covering some entry fees and an occasional bus. The third school said they were well supported by their district, but that they also did fundraising for trips and supplies.

### **Nature of Instruction**

The band offerings were fairly consistent for all three high schools, but slightly varied in size and amount of ensembles. The primary ensemble in each school was the concert band, but all of the schools offered marching band in the fall. The marching ensemble was required at EHS and MHS, but optional and extracurricular at PHS. The programs also each offered two levels of concert bands, however at EHS the second class was a high school beginning band for the students that weren't ready to play in the concert/marching ensemble. PHS and MHS each offered two levels of concert bands and had a non-marching element in the fall. At MHS, the non-marching element was supplemental and directed at the more advanced students. All three schools had at least one jazz band. Jazz was taught during the school day at EHS, before school at MHS and after school at PHS.

Performance experiences were also similar. Every marching band played at four to six home football games as well as two to four marching competitions, there were three school based concerts, at least one fundraising event, and all groups participated in their district assessment festival. There was also evidence to support the solo and ensemble element in every program and student participation in solo and ensemble festival and honor bands. Programs also seemed to

emphasize focus on fundamentals and individual musicianship and two of them mentioned using the all-state audition as an assessment tool.

Length of instructional time and the time of day that rehearsals took place was another consistency in all three programs. Each program rehearsed with their primary marching or concert band daily for anywhere from 75 to 105 minutes in the morning. At two of the schools, this instruction began in zero hour and went into first period, where at the third school this took place over two block periods. All schools had an afternoon or evening component as well. After school weekly sectionals were also present in two of the schools.

### **Directors Responsible for the Program**

Team teaching and coordination with the middle school programs was apparent in each school, though support varied slightly. One school paid two middle school directors through the boosters to work with the high school out of their contract time while the high school director had time in the afternoon to visit the middle schools. The other two programs had team teaching at the middle schools built into their teaching schedule. Each district had at least one full-time director per school with the exception of Prairieland where the three directors in the district also taught sixth grade band at the elementary schools, Meadowview also had an additional assistant high school director and a percussion instructor that were also paid through the district.

Interviews and observations of head directors revealed an ability to identify inaccuracies in pitch, intonation, balance, blend, rhythm, tempo and phrasing. They also had knowledge of the score and musical preparation, positive student rapport, established routines, high expectations, and redirected students when expectations were not met. While the directors talked about their backgrounds, each of them brought up at least one past mentor that had an effect on their teaching or their educational outlook. They also all had degrees in music education from universities and a sense of pride in their job and program.



### **Funding and Support**

The administrative support of the three programs varied slightly, but they all had some consistencies. The most consistent theme was support was for daily instructional time and scheduling. The bands met five days a week in the mornings, though two of the bands utilized zero hour, and the third experienced some inconsistencies for the first time this year. All three schools mentioned providing uniforms and some large instruments for the students, but it was not always clear whether these came from the boosters or the school district. The presence of parent booster programs was another consistent theme with all schools. The roles of the booster programs were primarily for fundraising, communication, and other assistance such as providing snacks or arranging carpools.

Some examples of variance in the amount of support for each program was the amount of additional certified band directors, district providing transportation costs, the types of fundraisers utilized, and the music and supply budgets.

### **Implications for Best Practices**

The comparison of the data reveals several themes present in all of the high school band programs studied. Evidence was found in each program of a full-time, experienced, licensed band director with a degree in music. The head director of each program showed signs of excellent musical skills including score study, musical preparation and the ability to detect inaccuracies in pitch, rhythm, tempo, balance, articulation, intonation, and phrasing. Each director also showed evidence of having pride in their position, positive rapport with their students, a strong mentor and an awareness of community values. Team teaching was practiced in all three programs to varying degrees and each head high school director was involved at the middle schools at least several times a week. Middle school directors were also involved at the high school and helped with the marching band. Most significantly, all three directors showed a

sense of pride for teaching at their particular program and preparation to address the challenges that came along with it. Each director was proud to be at their particular school and excited to help their community.

Rehearsal schedules revealed consistent instructional time in the morning five days a week, and at least one period during the school day for all three schools. Programs that rehearsed during a single class period in the school day added additional rehearsal time during zero hour, and all programs had instructional time in the evenings or afternoons consisting of sectionals or marching band rehearsal. Observations revealed that rehearsal time was utilized efficiently with established routines, quick transitions, and cycles of modeling, scaffolding, corrective feedback, and positive reinforcement. Each rehearsal observed had clear objectives and a sense of flow.

Evidence was found that district support of instructional time and full time equivalency for band staff greatly assisted each program's ability to recruit students and establish expectations for the band program at a younger age. Additionally, a pattern of success, high expectations, emphasis on work ethic, and a team and family atmosphere assisted each program with recruitment and retention of their populations with low socioeconomic status. Comparatively low band fees of \$100-180 with scholarship waivers and ample opportunities for fundraising were also utilized and may imply a best practice to fund programs for low socioeconomic populations. EHS, the school with the highest percentage of free and reduced lunch, only collected the full fee from around 30% of the students, but still required a discounted fee and fundraising. It also seems significant that Bobby attested he would lose half of his program if he charged fees similar to other programs of that size. This information gives us an insight into how directors can alter their fee schedule to assure that their program is accessible to the community, and still have some financial investment by students and parents.

### **Reflections on the Study**

Reflecting on the study itself, the research question turned out to be broad. There were a lot of variables that revealed many different implications. More concise results might have been found with a focus specifically on one *measure of excellence* or one *best practice* such as scheduling, funding, fee structure etc. Measuring excellence in itself was avoided in this study because it is problematic in music. Music is qualitative and sometimes subjective in nature. Different assessments or traditional measures of excellence such as competitions, enrollment, or sophistication of literature may not philosophically coincide with a particular teacher or director, or they may not be culturally relevant to a particular group of students.

The purposeful sampling technique utilized of surveying experts in the field was relevant and reliable for this study but may not be applicable to all aspects of music education and all communities. This study was focused in one southwestern state and professors sampled were from the same university, so the sampling technique might have favored more traditional band programs that were in proximity to that university. That being said, these experts in the field had decades of experience with music education in this and other states.

### **Approaches to Challenges**

It was interesting to see how Bobby, Allison and Samuel approached some of the challenges that I faced in my teaching experience in a low-socioeconomic school. One of the most significant challenges was attendance at out of school activities. A co-curricular expectation was a part of all three programs studied that included a summer band camp, zero hour and evening rehearsals, as well as clinics and competitions on some weekends. One approach to attendance problems was the presence of absence request forms in the handbooks and the expectation that students call if they are going to miss something. All of the directors

talked about how it took a while to build up a culture of attendance and accountability led by many of the students. The programs at Prairieland, Meadowview, and Eastbrook did have a larger amount of students in the program and a longer of more positive band tradition. However, Allison said Eastbrook did not seem to be in good shape when she started and she did not think her current students knew much about the schools past band traditions. A solution Meadowview had with attendance was having alternate positions in their marching show to cover students who quit or lost their spot due to poor attendance.

The only program in the study where I observed similar issues with attendance at out of school events was Eastbrook, but Allison was extremely proactive and was constantly taking notes on students to follow up with. She made use of calling parents, self-regulation among the students, and the support of an administrator responsible for attendance. Allison and Samuel also mentioned the need for some students to get jobs or watch siblings, and that they were cognizant of their co-curricular requirements. One advantage the schools in this study may have had in terms of the attendance expectation was the consistency and quality of the feeder programs. Bobby, Samuel, and Allison were all involved with their feeder programs so they had the chance to get to know the students and establish their expectations before the students got to high school. Allison expressed that her feeder programs had not been good in the past, but things were taking a turn for the better, and that change had contributed to the growth of her program.

Charter and private schools were one reason that I seemed to lose a lot of students where I taught high school band, and the literature gives evidence to support a negative correlation with the amount of charter schools and the size and perceived quality of music programs (Hedgecoth, 2017, Syme, 2015). The presence or proliferation of charter and alternative schools was not mentioned as a challenge in any of the director interviews. Bobby mentioned that having a one high school town was a big advantage and gave them the opportunity to vertically align their

curriculum, and Samuel and Allison did not mention them at all. However, vertical alignment and the ability to team teach were both strong themes in this study, and inconsistent matriculation patterns and losing students to other secondary school options would make vertical alignment more difficult.

The bad reputation of the school was another challenge I had that did not seem to be present at all of the subject schools. Prairieland High School and Meadowview High School were in locations where they were the primary high school, and there were not a lot of secondary school options. Eastbrook was in an urban setting where there were more school options, and it was in a part of town that has a poor reputation. However, Allison did mention that she was excited that her program was seen as a bright spot of her school because many other programs struggled.

Issues with students having other co-curricular commitments was talked about by Allison and Samuel. They both said that they were supportive of students who did sports and other activities and that they were cognizant not to require too much outside of school. Bobby was cognizant to adhere to the eight hour out of school rehearsal rule so as not to overtax students. All of these programs required much more out of class time than I ever did when I was struggling with student attendance. They may have been more successful because of more established expectations at the middle school level and the establishment of a consistent culture of out of school rehearsal and performance success. The only program that mentioned student transportation issues to rehearsals and events was Eastbrook and Allison said they often had to be proactive to set up carpools for students, and that they had the availability of the city bus system.

Whether it be finding a way to overcome transportation difficulties, finding new more efficient ways to teach fundamentals or finding ways to finance the program without charging

heavy fees, directors in every situation must cater their music education philosophy to the community they are in. The programs in this study had several likenesses, but each community was unique, just as each director and their music education philosophy was unique. To assume that all low socioeconomic areas have similar values and will respond to the same strategies would be parochial. The best practices implied by this study can be ideally used to improve educational practice, but may not be applicable to every community and every situation. I think an important takeaway from this all is that the best practices that have been developed in these programs may or may not resonate with every particular teacher or community. It is up to each educator to build a relationship with their community and find ways to motivate their students to want to learn music to their full potential.

### **Implications for Future Research**

One of the most problematic aspects in designing this study was finding an objective, valid and reliable measure of excellence that could be used to identify high achieving programs. Many of the traditional measures of excellence in the music education profession such as marching band competitions, ratings at festival, percentage of students in honor groups, and students continuing in music after school have some sort of inherent bias or subjective rating system. Future research into the validity of different evaluation systems could lend a clearer picture into identifying best practices. More specific research is needed on how we measure program quality. Measuring the socioeconomic status of schools was also difficult. Many states have stopped tracking free and reduced lunch data for the lowest socioeconomic schools in favor of offering the service to all students. This has made it increasingly difficult for researchers to acquire accurate data to compare the socioeconomic status of different schools.

This study also revealed the need to train preservice music teachers to be able to work with a variety of populations and situations to guarantee that quality programs are available for

all students. The directors in this study seemed to have a clear understanding of the needs of their community, and had a sense of pride in their position, but that may not be the case for all music educators. Because student rapport was observed in each rehearsal, the perceptions of students could also be studied as well as specific ways that teachers build that trust and rapport. Further research could be done on the backgrounds of preservice music educators and the nature of the high school programs that they attended. When many undergraduates look at programs that tout a heavy competition schedule and large numbers, they don't always see the advantages that a particular community might have or they may, like me, assume that the same prescription and procedures will work everywhere.

There are several additional implications that could support future research including strong evidence of the importance of rehearsing every day, rehearsing in the morning, team teaching, fee structure, and rehearsal procedures. Future projects could include the relationship of fees, teacher qualities, student contact time, or team teaching with enrollment and retention in band programs across different socioeconomic levels. Repeating a similar study in different areas or perhaps focusing on small schools, a specific demographic or other music ensembles such as choral, orchestra or non-traditional music ensembles could also yield important information.

### **Personal Reflection**

I learned a lot from getting to know the three directors and programs in this study. Most of the things that I observed and talked about with the directors were general best practices in teaching music and music pedagogy. Many of these strategies such as modeling, efficient rehearsal structure, and musical preparation are best practices for teaching music in most situations.

I enjoyed getting to know a little about each director and their values about music education. All three of them showed a deep care and concern for the success of their students,

but all had slightly different personalities and philosophies that came out in their teaching. Allison seemed to have a clear musical vision and showed concern and care for getting every detail of the music to sound excellent. Samuel had a talent for structure and breaking things down into levels of achievement before adding complexity. Bobby seemed to value skill development, perfection, and mastery of fundamental technique on the instruments and then utilizing that foundation to learn music masterfully.

Each of the programs had a competitive aspect whether it was in marching or concert band, but I never felt that this was driven by the ego of the director. In each case, the quality of the music was paramount to any award or accomplishment. The directors seemed to utilize competition as a way to give their students the experience of being successful and learning to build off of that success. All of the directors adopted a positive attitude when it came to the challenges of teaching at a low socioeconomic school. No one made any excuses or held any belief that they had to somehow lower expectations for their student population because they were incapable of a high level of achievement. On the contrary, there seemed to be a realization that they must be even more proactive about their high expectations and more consistent on following through. I have witnessed many teachers in all socioeconomic levels make excuses because of a perceived problem with their students or schedule or administration that was not the case with these three teachers. That being said, they may have had more realistic viewpoints concerning their students values and career goals, and took time to thoughtfully cater their program to their community. There was not an expectation that many of their students would go on to be music majors, but they all seemed to be driven more about teaching their students hard work, time management, teamwork, and skills that would relate to other aspects of their lives.

This study revealed to me the importance of having pride and integrity in your teaching and faith in your students regardless of any competitive outcome. All of these incredible



teachers were effective primarily because of their high expectations and relentless pursuit of excellence. That seemed to be what the students latched on to and what set these programs apart from others that may focus primarily on a competitive goal. Placing the needs of the students should be a primary focus of every educator and I believe data from this study supports that. This process has greatly informed my practice and I hope that it will also benefit others.

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## APPENDIX A

### Band Program Artifact Analysis

School Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_ School Year \_\_\_\_\_

These will ideally include: handbook, syllabus, performance schedule, rehearsal schedule and recent concert programs.

Look for following items

#### Nature of Instruction

1. Ensemble opportunities in this program
2. Expectations on time commitment
3. Prerequisite knowledge or experiences assumed or required
4. Implied benefits of being in the program
5. Signs of a unique cultural relevance
6. Nature of the musical literature that is performed and studied?

#### Persons responsible for instruction

1. Background info about the teacher
2. References to additional staff or instructors
3. References to small group or private lesson offerings

#### Program Resources

1. What are the costs to the students
2. Details about support from the school district?
3. What is provided by these costs?
4. Details on other sources of funding

## APPENDIX B

### Band Director Interview Questions

1. Tell me some things that make you proud to be the director of this program.
2. Tell me about the ensembles in your program
  - a. Describe the students in each ensemble.
3. What are some musical and non-musical concepts that you hope that your students take away from your program?
4. Tell me about your student population and the community that your program serves.
  - a. Talk about some values and priorities you see in your community.
  - b. What are some motivating factors that keep students in your program?
5. Tell me about some ways that your program is connected to your school and community?
  - a. Have you had to adapt or change anything about your program in this community? How?
  - b. Tell me about some ways that you communicate with parents and your community.
6. Tell me about your professional background and musical upbringing. (names and places will be generalized in the final report)
  - a. What brought you to this particular position?
7. Are there other teachers and instructors involved in your program?
  - a. and can you tell me about them and their professional backgrounds?
8. Tell me about your rehearsal expectations and the time commitments involved in your program?
  - a. Talk about some ways you reinforce these expectations
9. Walk me through a typical day of rehearsal
10. What kinds of performance experiences are involved in your program?
11. Tell me about the funding structure of your program.
  - a. Do you charge student fees?
  - b. Do your students fundraise?
  - c. Talk about some things these funds provide for your students?
12. Tell me about some challenges and/or benefits that you have or have had teaching in this particular community?
  - a. What are some ways you address the challenges and/or take advantage of the benefits?
13. What kinds of musical things do your students do when they leave your program?

**APPENDIX C**

**Observation t-chart**

Setting (Pseudonym):

Director (Pseudonym):

Observation #:

Date/Time:

Location:

Duration:

**Descriptive Notes:**

**Reflective Notes:**