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# LINKS BETWEEN SCHOOL MUSIC CLUBS AND STUDENT ATTENDANCE

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LINKS BETWEEN SCHOOL MUSIC CLUBS AND STUDENT ATTENDANCE

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A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Music in Music Education

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By

Katherine Fisher Brizuela

Summer 2017

**THESIS OF KATHERINE FISHER BRIZUELA APPROVED BY**

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Date

## **Dedication**

To my loving husband, supportive staff, and brilliant students.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Sheila Woodward, Music Department Chair at Eastern Washington University. Teaching full time while completing a master's degree long distance was challenging, but Dr. Woodward was always available by email, phone call, or video chat. She supported my passion for action research and helped me organize my ideas into a cohesive project.

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the association of before-school music clubs with school attendance in third- to fifth-grade at one public elementary school in the Pacific Northwest of the United States of America. At the time of the study, this school had a total student population of 516, an approximately 65% free and reduced lunch rate, and one of the lowest reported attendance rates in the district. The before-school music clubs included one 28-member world music *Drumming Club* that would meet two days a week (Mondays and Tuesdays), as well as one *Thursday Choir* and one *Friday Choir*, each of which would meet once a week. *Thursday Choir* had approximately 30 enrolled students while *Friday Choir* had approximately 40 enrollments. This action research involved an empirical descriptive design with two components. The first was an analysis of numerical attendance data and the second was a survey with open-ended questions aimed at deriving a deeper understanding of student perceptions of attendance practices. After comparing attendance data of club participants with that of the entire school population, third- to fifth-grade students' further relationships were investigated. Existing numerical attendance data of third- to fifth-grade students were then compared with club participants' attendance data. Furthermore, the researcher compared club participants' school attendance on their club day(s) versus other days of the week. This attendance per day-of-the-week was also compared against the day-of-the-week attendance of non-club participants within third- to fifth-grade students. Results of data analysis indicate that music club participation is linked to school attendance. The anonymous survey administered to club participants explored student perceptions of their

school attendance reflecting on (1) their mode of travel to school, (2) what makes it easy or difficult for them to attend school and (3) what they like, dislike and feel about attending school and attending before-school music clubs. While the results of this study are not generalizable, they may be of interest to principals and teachers considering implementing similar clubs at schools with attendance challenges.

## **Preface**

The researcher is an elementary music teacher in the Pacific Northwest. She graduated from Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, WA, with a Bachelor in Music Education and is currently pursuing a Master of Music with emphasis in Music Education from Eastern Washington University in Cheney, WA. She also completed all three Orff certification levels from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. The researcher is very passionate about music education and hopes to pursue research and professional development throughout her career to continually improve her craft.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background**

Low-income elementary students are more likely to have poor attendance in school, because “when economic resources are scarce, children face challenges at multiples levels that may impact their likelihood of attending school on time or at all” (Morrissey, Hutchison, & Winsler, 2013, p. 2). Unfortunately, there are many reasons why low-income students may have a difficult time coming to school and might become at-risk in the education system. For example, it has been suggested that low-income students may face bigger hurdles that directly or indirectly impact getting to school on time. These challenges may include “physical, behavioral, and mental health problems... due to environmental hazards, family conflict, instability, child maltreatment, neighborhood violence and... increased stress from community violence, gangs, or drug activity; a lack of positive role models and the presence of negative peer influence” (Morrissey et al., p. 2).

At the time of this study, the researcher was employed as the music specialist at a public elementary school with an approximately 65% free and reduced lunch rate in the Pacific Northwest of the USA. Previous district data collected by the assistant principal showed that this school had been struggling with attendance, and in January, 2016, only 67% of the student body was present 90% of the time, the lowest in several years. At this elementary school, the researcher ran three before-school music clubs and noticed the obvious trend that students participating in the before-school music clubs naturally arrived in their regular classroom on time on the day of the club activity. This led to the researcher

questioning whether before-school music clubs might possibly impact participants' school attendance. At this elementary school, the researcher frequently teaches songs in different languages and instrumental pieces from around the world. She uses these songs and pieces to provide a basis for discussion of how the students' personal cultures can relate to the cultures related to the music. By fostering student acceptance of diverse music in the classroom, she actively encourages a safe environment for all students from the school population's many diverse backgrounds and cultures. She has wondered whether this safe, accepting environment might be motivating students to be a part of music clubs that might positively affect their attendance. Through this action research study, the researcher sought to explore possible associations between participation in before-school music clubs and school attendance.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on the theoretical framework that music programs in schools impact improved school attendance rates, providing incentive for both low-income and non-low-income students to attend school. The literature suggests that these clubs might provide an "entry point where students can experience success and make connections, develop strategic knowledge, and increase interests in other subject areas" (Gregoire & Lupinetti, 2005, p. 160) that may contribute to club participants' overall school attendance. It has been further suggested that music education provides a common ground that connects low-income or at-risk students with the social environment around them, "the arts are largely nonverbal and focus on creativity, students in any classroom can participate in various satisfying ways"

(Gregoire & Lupinetti, 2005, p. 159). Whether that means giving students a sense of belonging in the school's music activities, or connecting them with other students in music group activities, music education is viewed as a way to bridge the gap between the public school system and students from low-income families (Brown, Benedett, & Armistead, 2009). Access to music education can provide "opportunities for children of different developmental levels to engage meaningfully and experience success" (Brown et al., 2009, p. 113). Researchers have found that "including the arts in education provides opportunities for building on students' cultural knowledge, incorporation varied cultural traditions, and encouraging student to bring their individual realities to the classroom" (Brown, et al., 2009, p. 113). A key theoretical basis for this study is the findings of a Harris Interactive Inc. study (2006), where school administrators perceive music education being linked to student education success. This study was commissioned by the National Association for Music Education (NAfME, previously known as MENC). Through the study, Harris Interactive Inc. determined that "attendance rates at schools with music programs was reported at 93.3 percent; for those without, it was 84.9%." Furthermore, they found that administrators saw music education programs as positively impacting student engagement in other school activities and events, higher grades, better relationships with other students, retention, and graduation rates (Harris Interactive Inc., 2006). The researcher was curious to see if frequent access to music clubs might be associated with positive school attendance at the elementary school where she teaches.

**Problem Statement**

District data indicates that this Pacific Northwest elementary school has the lowest attendance in their district. Administrators and teachers at this school are actively seeking information on attendance in order to implement measures that might positively impact student attendance.

**Need for the Study**

In an attempt to explore possible ways to improve student attendance at this school, there is a need to determine whether before-school music activities might be linked with positive student school attendance.

**Significance of the Study**

The results of the study are of importance to the school administrators and teachers where the study was conducted, as they have been seeking ways to improve attendance. While the results may not be applicable beyond this school, they may provide valuable background information for teachers, principals, and superintendents who are considering implementing similar music clubs at other schools.

**Purpose Statement**

This action research study aimed to examine if there was a link between student participation in before-school music clubs and their school attendance at one school in the Pacific Northwest of the USA.

**Research Questions**

This study focusses on two research questions:

1. Is participation in before-school music programs linked to student attendance?
2. What are student perceptions of what contributes towards and motivates their school attendance?

### **Study population**

In this action research, numerical attendance data (for Fall Trimester 2016) was collected for all 516 students at one elementary school in the Pacific Northwest, USA at which the researcher was teaching. All third- to fifth-grade club students, providing signed parental consent and giving their assent, were included in the anonymous survey, totaling 66 students out of 100 enrolled club students.

### **Research Instrument**

The research instrument for the survey part of the study was an open-ended written questionnaire. The questions were designed using language appropriate for upper elementary grade level students. All surveys were in English and while interpreters were openly made available for Spanish speaking English Language Learners. However, no such assistance was requested by any student.

### **Research Design**

This action research involved an empirical descriptive design including two components: analysis of numerical student attendance data and a survey with open-ended questions administered to students attending at least one of the before-school music clubs. The anonymous survey for participating music students aimed to explore a deeper understanding of students' perception of their school attendance, reflecting on (1) what



means of travel they use to attend school, (2) what makes it easy or difficult for them to attend school and (3) what they like, dislike and feel about attending school and about attending before-school music programs.

### **Research Analysis**

Existing numerical attendance data of third- to fifth-grade students were compared between those participating in before-school music clubs and the general school population. Furthermore, the researcher compared club participants' average school attendance on their rehearsal day(s) versus other days of the week by comparing average day-of-the-week club participant attendance. She also collected average day-of-the-week attendance for all third- to fifth-grade non-club participants and compared that with the average day-of-the-week attendance of club participants. In the survey research, the researcher analyzed the data in order to provide a detailed description of student perceptions pertaining to school attendance.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This results of this study is limited to the one Pacific Northwest elementary school at which the study was conducted. Results of similar studies at other public schools may vary from different teaching environments, students, music club offerings, and instructors.

### **Definitions**

In this study, the terms listed below are used to denote the following meanings:

- At-risk – students who are more likely to struggle or fail at school.

- Low socioeconomic status – students who receive free or reduced lunch at the school, based on forms completed by parents pertaining to income.

## Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

### Introduction

This chapter provides a review of literature related to the field of student education success and links to music programs. It is suggested by the researcher that getting to school on time may be difficult for some students, and impossible at times for others. Specifically, students from low-income families are statistically more likely to be tardy or absent (Morrissey et al., 2013). In the researcher's experience of teaching general music at an elementary school with a high free and reduced lunch rate for the past four years, she has seen many at-risk students miss hours of school because they repeatedly arrive late, leave early, or miss school altogether, sometimes for days in a row. Informally examining her school's attendance data, the researcher noticed that students who interact with specialists (music, physical education, technology, and library) first thing in the morning appear to have the best attendance rates in the school. In providing a background to this action research study, this literature review aims to present research that addresses the value and importance of music education in schools while indicating that music programs provide a constructive solution to helping at-risk, low-income students, improving attendance rates and academic achievement levels. The review opens with an exploration of challenges facing at-risk students from low-income families. Following this, literature is reviewed pertaining to policies addressing attendance challenges; links between music programs and attendance; and, finally, links between music programs, academic achievement, and graduation rates.

### **Challenges Facing At-Risk Students from Low-Income Families**

In order to understand the effects of music education for at-risk students from low-income families, Morrissey, Hutchison, and Winsler (2013) explain that one needs to explore challenges that students from low-income families face and how they may become at-risk. The researcher suggests that practical difficulties conceivably result in these students battling much bigger hurdles than their peers for getting to school on time (or even for getting to school at all). This is in line with the views of Morrissey et al., (2013) who further suggests that,

children living in low-income families experience physical, behavioral, and mental health problems... due to environmental hazards, family conflict, instability, child maltreatment, neighborhood violence and ... increased stress from community violence, gangs, or drug activity. (p. 2)

Of course, it is recognized that students from wealthy families also might experience family conflicts, instability, child maltreatment, drugs, etc. However, the researcher suggests that possible compounded and continuous financial and financially-related instabilities in the home lives of students from low income families potentially intensify any such factors that might, in turn, negatively affect school attendance and academic scores. The literature supports these ideas in the following ways.

Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) found that low-income students are often academically outperformed by higher income students, mainly due to the resources and family culture surrounding them. They suggest that “family income seems to be more strongly related to children’s ability and achievement-related outcomes than to emotional outcomes” (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 67). The researcher’s informal observations

of her higher income students is that they are more likely to have technology and financial resources available to them, and possibly more academic and emotional support from a parent either not working at all or working shorter hours. “Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth” it has been shown “that an increase in annual income of \$1,000 was associated with a 2.1% and 3.6% of a standard deviation increase in children’s math and reading test scores” (Dahl and Locherner, 2005, quoted in Morrissey et al., 2013, p. 1). However, not all low-income students are negatively affected academically. “Much of the observed relationship between income and schooling appears to be related to a number of confounding factors such as parental education, family structure, and neighborhood characteristics” (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 62) that are stated to be often found in low-income households. Students affected by unstable family structure or what Brook-Gunn and Duncan (1997) refer to as dangerous “neighborhood characteristics” (p. 62) may face many challenges in their lives that contribute to poor attendance and/or academic decline. The author suggests that these challenges are especially impactful in the child’s developmental years. “Low income during the preschool and early school years exhibits the strongest correlation with low rates of high school completion, as compared with low-income during the childhood and adolescent years” (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 68).

### **Links Between Music Programs and Student Attendance**

It is the researcher’s experience that music education programs provide a common ground that connects low-income students with their environment and the community around them. Whether that means taking part in activities that help them feel a part of the

school's culture, or connecting with other students, she has found that music education is a way to bridge the gap between the demanding public school system and the struggles of students from low-income families. Researchers Brown, Benedett, and Armistead (2009) suggest, "cultural relevance theory holds that the relevance of education depends on incorporating students' prior cultural knowledge, which for many racial/ethnic minority student includes expression through the arts" (p. 113). They propose that creating a positive culture in the music room is important for student inclusion and involvement. Furthermore, they suggest that "social-emotional benefits of arts education may hold particular importance for young children at-risk including those from low-income and racial/ethnic minority backgrounds" (Brown et al., 2009, p. 113).

A safe environment is widely recognized as something that all human beings need to have in their lives. Unfortunately, because of their potentially unstable financial situations, low-income students may have fewer opportunities to fulfill basic human needs, especially if homeless and/or living in low-security housing areas (Morrissey et al, 2013). Abraham Maslow (1943), a psychologist from the twentieth century, believed that all human beings are motivated to fulfil five basic needs in their lives; physiological, safety, esteem, social, and self-actualization. He claimed that low-income students are so focused on meeting physiological and safety needs that they require an outlet to help them meet esteem, social, and self-actualization needs. He proposed that, "satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world" (Maslow, 1943, p. 382). Southgate and Roscigno (2009) from Ohio

State University suggest that music education in schools can meet those needs, stating that it provides students with a meaningful social outlet where they can set goals and work to achieve them. They write, “music participation at school has been shown to bolster not only individual benefits such as friendships with like-minded individuals and modeling commitment through rehearsal, but school music productions are perceived as making a valuable contribution to social life” (Southgate & Roscigno, 2009, pp. 7-8). While interviewing middle school music students about why they choose to be in music classes, Davis (2009) states that students relate to things once they have become meaningful to them. She defines meaning as including multiple facets, such as achievement, spiritualistic, musical-artistic, communicative, psychological, and integrative meaning (Davis, 2009). Whether students need to fulfill emotional needs or find meaning in their schooling, “for at-risk students, the arts are an entry point, where students can experience success and make connections, develop strategic knowledge, and increase interest in other subject areas” (Gregoire & Lupinetti, 2005, p. 160). Based on the literature presented, the researcher suggests that music fulfills basic human needs in ways that affect students, regardless of family income.

Brown, Benedett, and Armistead (2009) propose that one of the many struggles that low-income families have is preparing their child for elementary school socially, emotionally and academically. They describe the Settlement Music School in Philadelphia addressing this issue by starting the *Kaleidoscope Preschool* in 1990, and designed a

curriculum specifically to help solve the problem.<sup>1</sup> They explain that this Head Start school uses art, music and movement as teaching vessels to connect and continue student learning, not as something extra to the curriculum. Instead, they state,

Kaleidoscope uses the arts to teach core cognitive skills in a full, intentional, and structured way. In this model, classes in music, creative movement, and visual arts, as well as early learning, represent a regular part of the daily schedule, and function as co-equal means for promoting language literacy, mathematics, science, and other skills. (p. 121)

By mainstreaming the arts in education this way, Brown et al. (2009) state that the *Kaleidoscope Preschool* is continuously able to prepare students for school. When comparing this arts-focused head start preschool with a non-arts focused school with similar demographics, they say that “children at Kaleidoscope improved and drew closer to age-based norms, whereas those at the comparison preschool showed less growth, and a widening gap in relation to the norms” (p. 114). They explain that *Kaleidoscope Preschool* used music to close the academic gap for low-income students, as well as “showed higher scores at the end of a year of program attendance” (Brown et al., 2009, p. 122). This study of the preschool’s free and accessible integrated arts preschool suggests that, because of arts integration in the preschool curriculum, student attendees had higher attendance and academic achievement than other low-income preschools.

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1. <sup>1</sup> : Parsons, K. (2013). *Settlement music school expands its early childhood curriculum to include programs for infants and toddlers*. Retrieved from <https://www.settlementmusic.org/prek-and-after-school-care/> and Settlement Music School. (2012, August 28th). *Kaleidoscope Preschool Arts Enrichment Pre-K at Settlement Music School*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBHKHo9AGTM>



### **Links Between Music Clubs, Academic Achievement, and Graduation Rates**

Studies have found that student attendance directly relates to student achievement, showing that, if a student does not come to school, they miss lessons that put them back academically. For example, a report by Morrissey et al., (2013) determined that, “the relationship between school attendance and achievement was concurrent; that is, in the same year, more days absent or times tardy were associated with lower grades and test scores” (p. 12). A 2016 study by the Office of Public Instruction found that Washington State had an average of 16.7% chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 18 or more school days in one academic year, excused or unexcused (WA OSPI). Neal Morton, a reporter for *The Seattle Times*, highlighted that “while the new data shows regular attendance is an issue in all groups of students, chronic absenteeism rates are particularly high for children who live in poverty, are homeless or identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native” (WA OSPI, quoted in Morton, 2017, p. 1). Out of 193,666 chronically absent students enrolled in Washington State public education during the 2015-2016 school year 123,438 (approximately 64%) of those students were considered low-income (WA OSPI).

The National Association for Music Education (NAfME, formerly MENC) was curious as to the relationship of music education programs with attendance and graduation rates and, in 2006, commissioned a study on “Understanding the Linkages Between Music Education and Educational Outcomes” (Harris Interactive Inc., 2006). In this study, Harris Interactive Inc. interviewed principals and administrators about their views of music education in public schools. The results indicated that “attendance rates at schools with

music programs was reported at 93.3 percent; for those without, it was 84.9%” (p. 9). The administrators further responded by saying that they believed student interaction with music clubs and classes impacted many other things outside of the music classroom such as grades, social skills and graduation rates. A 1999 study by Johnson and Memmott (2006) determined that music education also has a drastic impact on test scores, even at an elementary level. They found that secondary schools with “students involved in music had significantly higher standardized test scores than students not involved in music”, regardless of their socio-economic background (p. 294). These large-scale studies provide evidence of music education having a strong impact on low-income student attendance and academic achievement.

Smith (2010) proposes that intervention should be treated as prevention by starting social and emotional programs as early as preschool. She reviews findings from several studies (Raver, 2002; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004) indicating that social and emotional skills directly relate to academic success (Smith, 2008, p. 3). Further, Smith highlights the important role of music in fostering early development of social and emotional skills, stating that “young children cannot learn to read if they have problems getting along with others and controlling negative emotions, and problems that interfere with relationships with peers, teachers, and parents” (p. 1). Railsback (2004) draws attention to the value of family engagement, reporting that “family involvement is absolutely vital in attendance intervention programs” (p. 22). She suggests that showing families how creative,

passionate, and successful their child can be in a music-enriched program, illuminates for families the importance of school, academics and attendance.

## **Conclusion**

Low-income students and their families face many financial and environmental hurdles that appear to negatively impact school attendance and academics. The reviewed literature supports the theory that music education is a strong tool for developing student social skills and meeting emotional needs (Morrissey et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2009; Gregoire & Lupinetti, 2005). Evidence has been presented that music education programs can provide a positive outlet to reinforce academics and provide a much needed social and emotional environment for at-risk students with poor attendance and academics in schools (WA OSPI, 2017; Johnson & Memmott, 2006; Harris Interactive Inc., 2006). Creating or reinforcing these programs in schools is viewed as a pro-active, creative way of helping students find motivation and meaning in their schooling that may add value through both students and family involvement (Railsback, 2004). The researcher suggests that specific examples, like the *Kaleidoscope Preschool* program reviewed here, may provide inspiration for teachers, principals and school districts trying to reshape the future for all at-risk students through music and other arts programs at their schools (Brown et al., 2009). The view has been presented that supports implementing music education prevention and intervention programs as early as possible, to more successfully impact the academic success and attendance rates of at-risk, low-income students (Smith, 2008; Brown et al., 2009). With this review of research literature in the field, a foundation has been established for conducting an

action research study at an elementary school to determine whether there is evidence of links between before-school music programs and student attendance.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology of this action research. It presents the research site selection, study population, research instrument, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Research Site Selection**

This action research took place at a Pacific Northwest elementary school where the researcher was currently an employee teaching general music. At the time of the study, this elementary school had an approximately 65% free and reduced lunch rate with a student population of 58% White and 31% Hispanic; 22% of those students being English Language Learners, (WA OSPI). Analysis of district public school data by school administrators found that the average student attendance at this school was one of the lowest in the district in the 2015-2016 school year. While teaching at this school, the researcher noticed that several at-risk students would frequently arrive late, leave early, or miss days in a row.

### **Study Population**

2016 fall trimester numerical attendance data of all 516 school students was collected, as well as the numerical attendance data of all 100 third- to fifth-grade students enrolled in before-school music clubs. The survey was administered to all 66 grade 3-5 students enrolled in one of the three different before-school music clubs who returned signed consent forms and assented to participation.

### **Background to the Before-School Music Clubs**

At the time of the study, a 15-year-long tradition had existed at this school of offering before-school choirs, usually averaging a total of 60 to 70 participants across the two. Open to third- to fifth-grade students, the volunteers would sign up for choir, picking a once-weekly rehearsal day that worked best for their schedule, joining either the *Thursday Choir* or the *Friday Choir*. The groups would each meet once weekly for thirty minutes and rehearse towards numerous performances at the school, the All-District Choir Festival, the local high school's girl soccer game (singing the national anthem), the local middle school, and the local retirement home.

The *Drumming Club* was new to this elementary school in the year of the study. This group was a 28-member ensemble consisting of third- to fifth-grade students attending two 30-minute rehearsals weekly (Mondays and Tuesdays). They would perform Latin and African style pieces on congas and djembes, as well as repertoire from Will Schmid's World Music Drumming curriculum. For processional performances, they would perform on portable bucket drums and Boomwhackers™. This ensemble would rehearsal for performances at their own school and at the local high school, where they would join in the high school drumline.

This action research involved an empirical descriptive design with two components, involving analysis of numerical student attendance data and a survey with open-ended questions administered to students attending at least one of the before-school music clubs. The anonymous survey for participating club students aimed to explore a deeper

understanding of students' perception of their school attendance, reflecting on (1) what means of travel they use to attend school, (2) what makes it easy or difficult for them to attend school and (3) what they like, dislike and feel about attending school and about attending before-school music programs.

### **Research Instrument**

The research instrument for the survey was an anonymous, open-ended written questionnaire. The questions were designed to use language appropriate for upper elementary grade students. Interpreters and Spanish vocabulary surveys were made available for students as needed.

### **Population Recruitment.**

For the survey, participants were approached and recruited by the researcher during a regular before-school music club rehearsal session. The purpose and procedures of the survey were explained. The researcher further described the anonymous nature of the research instrument by explaining that their participation would be entirely voluntary, that there would be neither reward nor penalty for non-participation and that they may withdraw at any time. Students were provided with consent forms after a concert performance to take home and bring back signed by the end of a week. The researcher explained that a signed parental consent form was needed to complete the survey. She further explained that students would not receive negative consequences if their parents did not sign the consent form. In that case, students were told they would simply need to review their ensemble music quietly, while other students fill out the survey. Students were informed that

participation in the survey would indicate their assent to their participation in the study. Identity protection was further emphasized, with reference to the anonymity of surveys. Out of the total 100 club participants, 66 returned consent forms by the deadline and were included in the survey research.

### **Data Collection.**

The researcher received verbal permission from the school district to obtain access to numeral attendance data, which is also available on public record, and to administer the anonymous attendance survey. Written permission was obtained from the school principal. No student or parental consent was needed to access the numerical attendance data. The researcher collected third- to fifth-grade students' public school attendance records, as well as their attendance records pertaining to before-school music programs.

Once recruitment for the survey study was completed and the deadline was reached for students to return their signed parental consent forms, the survey was administered during regular club sessions over a period of three days. The researcher reminded students of the procedural information previously explained to the students during recruitment. Students not participating in the survey were instructed to sit quietly and review the music score to be learned in class that day. Because this was an anonymous survey, students were reminded not to write their names on the survey. In order to make this study valuable, students were told to answer the questions independently, without interacting with other students, and to answer as honestly and with as much attention to detail as possible. The researcher disseminated one copy of the survey to each student and then read through the questions



aloud to the group. Once students were instructed to begin the survey, students were given 15 minutes to complete. As previously instructed, students who had finished writing then turned in the survey, placing it upside down in a collection box and then quietly reviewed the music score to be learned in class that day. Once 15 minutes of allotted time had passed, the researcher shuffled the collected overturned surveys in order to further ensure anonymity. For those few students who needed more time to complete the survey, the researcher let them stay to complete it after the end of the ensemble time, calling their teacher to let them know that the student was, indeed, present at school and would be arriving late to class.

### **Research Analysis**

The researcher examined average attendance data of third- to fifth-grade students in music clubs, comparing the results with the average attendance of the general school population, and then with the average attendance of all third- to fifth-grade students. Furthermore, the average participants' attendance on club days was compared with that on other days of the week. Daily averages were finally compared between third- to fifth-grade students and non-club students. The researcher analyzed the survey results, reporting on all student perceptions in order to give a full picture and obtain greater understanding of attendance practices.

### **Procedure for Data Storage.**

Numerical data and analysis was stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop and then backed-up onto a password-protected hard drive. Hard copies of surveys

were destroyed after digitization, with digital data and analysis also stored on a password-protected computer and then backed-up onto a password-protected hard drive.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the action research. This study aimed to answer the two research questions: “Is participation in before-school music programs linked to student attendance?” and “What are student perceptions of what contributes towards and motivates their school attendance?” First, the results of a numerical analysis of attendance data provides a description of attendance practices linked to participation in before-school music clubs. Second, results of a survey administered to club participants gives further description of student perceptions on their school attendance pertaining to (1) what means of travel they use to attend school, (2) what makes it easy or difficult for them to attend school and (3) what they like, dislike and feel about attending school and about attending before-school music programs.

### **Links Between Music Clubs Participation and Numerical Attendance Data**

Analysis of the data indicates that music club participation is linked to school attendance. Baseline data from fall trimester, 2016, was examined, finding the average attendance rate for students in each grade level from kindergarten through grade five. In the 2016 fall trimester, there were 2,252.5 cumulative days of absences from the 516 students enrolled during that period. In this analysis, cumulative absence is defined as the sum total of school days missed. This includes a student being absent the entire school day, being tardy (less than ten minutes late), late arrivals (more than ten minutes late) and early dismissals. This averaged out to approximately 4.365 cumulative schools days of absences

per student. Table 1 outlines the number of students in each grade level, the total days of student cumulative school day absences in the fall trimester of 2016, and the average number of absences for each grade level.

**Table 1. Student Cumulative Absences, Grades K – 5**

Grade	Number of Students	Total Number of Grade Level Cumulative Absences	Average Number of Cumulative Absences in Fall Trimester 2016
K	80	368	4.646
1 <sup>st</sup>	78	435.5	5.583
2 <sup>nd</sup>	91	330.5	3.631
3 <sup>rd</sup>	78	312.5	4.006
4 <sup>th</sup>	100	413.5	4.135
5 <sup>th</sup>	89	392.5	4.10
Total	516 Students	Total Absences: 2252.5	4.365

Since the choir and drumming before-school music clubs are only available for students in third, fourth, and fifth grades, the researcher then analyzed attendance rates of all third- to fifth-grade students, finding an average cumulative absence rate of 4.189 days per student in the 2016 Fall Trimester (Table 2). This is slightly less than the 4.365 whole school average.

**Table 2. Student Cumulative Absences Grades, 3 – 5**

Grade	Number of Students	Total Number of Grade Level Absences	Average Number of Absences in Fall Trimester 2016
3 <sup>rd</sup>	78	312.5	4.006
4 <sup>th</sup>	100	413.5	4.135
5 <sup>th</sup>	89	392.5	4.10
Total	267 Students	Total Absences: 1118.5	4.189

The researcher then analyzed the school attendance rates of students involved in the before-school *Drumming Club* (Table 3). In the 2016 Fall Trimester, 28 students participated in the club and had an average of 3.214 cumulative absences. This is less than both the whole-school average absence and the third- to fifth-grade student average absence.

**Table 3. Drumming Student Cumulative Absences, Grades 3 – 5**

Grade	Number of Students	Total Number of Grade Level Absences	Average Number of Absences in Fall Trimester 2016
3 <sup>rd</sup>	4	24.5	6.125
4 <sup>th</sup>	19	57.5	3.026
5 <sup>th</sup>	5	8	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>28 Students</b>	<b>Total Absences: 90</b>	<b>3.214</b>

Following this, the researcher analyzed school absences of *Thursday Choir* club participants for 2016 Fall Trimester (Table 4). There were 39 students in the ensemble, with 120 cumulative absences. The average number of absences for each Thursday choir student was 3.078 days. This is over one full day fewer than both the total school average absence rate and the third- to fifth-grade student absence rate in fall trimester 2016.

**Table 4. Thursday Choir Student Cumulative Absences, Grades 3 – 5**

Grade	Number of Students	Total Number of Grade Level Absences	Average Number of Absences in Fall Trimester 2016
3 <sup>rd</sup>	6	14	2.333
4 <sup>th</sup>	27	86.5	3.204
5 <sup>th</sup>	6	19.5	3.25
<b>Total</b>	<b>39 Students</b>	<b>Total Absences: 120</b>	<b>3.078</b>

The researcher then analyzed the average absence rate for participants in the *Friday Choir* (Table 5). This ensemble had 49 students in the 2016 Fall Trimester and with 204.5 cumulative absences. The average absence rate was higher than both *Drumming Club* and *Thursday Choir*, with *Friday Choir* students being 4.173 days in 2016 Fall Trimester. However, this is still less than the total school average absence rate and third- to fifth-grade student average cumulative absence rate.

**Table 5. Friday Choir Student Cumulative Absences, Grades 3 – 5**

Grade	Number of Students	Total Number of Grade Level Absences	Average Number of Absences in Fall Trimester 2016
3 <sup>rd</sup>	13	38.5	2.962
4 <sup>th</sup>	13	67.5	5.192
5 <sup>th</sup>	23	98.5	4.283
Total	49 Students	Total Absences: 204.5	4.173

As outlined in Tables 1 to 5, a cumulative student absence includes the total amount of time a student is not in school. This includes missing full school days, missing half a day in the morning or afternoon and arriving tardy or late. When comparing average cumulative absences, music club participants had a lower average when compared to averages of kindergarten- to fifth-grade students and of third- to fifth-grade students. A further analysis was conducted that explores different student groups average absences related to missing the whole school days (Table 6). This data does not include tardies, arriving late, or leaving early. It only includes being absent for an entire school day. The kindergarten- to fifth-grade student school population was absent an average of 2.62 complete school days in fall trimester 2016. The third- to fifth-grade student population average was slightly less than

that, with an average of 2.47 complete school day absences. Students not involved in music clubs had a higher absence rate when compared to the overall third- to fifth-grade student average (2.47) and to the average absence of third- to fifth-grade club participants (2.28). Similar to the cumulative absences, *Drumming Club* and *Thursday Choir* had the lowest average absence rate. The *Drumming Club* participants missed an average of 1.80 complete school days while *Thursday Choir* missed an average of 1.95. *Friday Choir* had the highest average absence rate of the three groups, missing an average of 2.42 school days, yet this was still lower than the kindergarten- to fifth-grade student average (2.62), the overall third- to fifth-grade students average (2.47), and the third- to fifth-grade student non-club participants (2.58).

**Table 6. Average Entire School Day Absences**

Student Group	Average Full Day Absence – Fall Tri. 2016
Grade K-5	2.62
Grade 3-5	2.47
All Grade 3-5 Non-Club Participants	2.58
All Grade 3-5 Club Participants	2.28
<i>Drumming Club</i>	1.80
<i>Thursday Choir</i>	1.95
<i>Friday Choir</i>	2.42

#### **Attendance on Specific Club Day Compared with Other Days**

Beyond the above analyses, the researcher was also interested in whether club participants demonstrated different school attendance practices on club days over other days. One important thing to know about this elementary school is that every Wednesday is a late

start for students, while teachers have meetings. This particular elementary school starts school at 9:00 a.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursday, and Fridays and at 10:35 a.m. on Wednesdays. Due to the teacher meetings on Wednesday mornings, the researcher was not able to hold before-school clubs on Wednesdays.

The researcher analyzed the percentage of the total *Drumming Club* student cumulative weekly absences during fall trimester 2016 on each individual day of the week, to see if there was a lower percentage of absences on club days than on other days. She then also compared these percentages with the percentage of absences of all third- to fifth-grade students (Table 7) on each day of the week. All four groups (*Drumming Club*, *Thursday Choir*, *Friday Club* and non-club third- to fifth-grade students) had their best attendance rates on late-start Wednesdays. *Drumming Club* participants were absent 13 cumulative days on Wednesdays. This was only 14.13% of their own total absences occurring on Wednesdays, against the 13.52% of third- to fifth-grade students who were not in *Drumming Club*. The results indicate that, on *Drumming Club* days (Mondays and Tuesdays), the club participants were more likely to come to school. *Drumming Club* participants missed 18 cumulative days of school on Mondays and Tuesday (Table 7). This is 19.56% of their total absences occurring on Mondays, against 26.76% of the total Monday absences for non-*Drumming Club* third- to fifth-grade students. The club participants showed a consistent absenteeism rate on Tuesdays (their other club day), also at 18 days (19.56%), and this was only slightly higher than the 19.27% of total Tuesday absences of non-*Drumming Club* third- to fifth-grade students. *Drumming Club* participant absence rates were higher on other



(non-club) days of the week, excluding late-start Wednesdays. *Drumming Club* students missed a cumulative total of 21 days on Thursdays, being 22.83% of their own total absences, compared with 21.28% of the Thursday absences of non-*Drumming Club* students; and 22 days or 23.91% of their absences on Fridays compared with the 19.18% of Friday absences of non-*Drumming Club* students.

**Table 7. Drumming and Non-club Cumulative Absences on Specific Days of the Week, Grades 3 – 5**

School Day	Drumming Number of Days Absent	Drumming Students Weekly Absence Percentage	Non-club Weekly Absence Percentage
Mondays	18	19.56%	26.76%
Tuesdays	18	19.56%	19.27%
Wednesdays	13	14.13%	13.52%
Thursdays	21	22.83%	21.28%
Fridays	22	23.91%	19.18%
Total:	92	100%	100%

Like *Drumming Club* students, *Thursday Choir* participants had their best attendance rate on late start Wednesdays. This group of 39 participants missed 16 cumulative Wednesdays, which was 11.19% of their own total absences, which is lower than the Wednesday rate of non-*Thursday Choir* participants at 13.89% (Table 8). On Thursdays, which was their club rehearsal day, participants missed 23 days, or 16.08% of their own cumulative absences, compared with the much higher non-*Thursday Choir* participants Thursday rate of 22.13% of their total absences. Excluding late-start Wednesdays, Thursday was the most attended school day by the *Thursday Choir* participants. Their percentages of weekly absence rates on other days of the week were higher than the weekly averages of

attendance of non- *Thursday Choir* student on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays, being respectively 27.97% against 25.96%; 22.38% against 18.87% and 22.38% against 19.16%.

**Table 8. Thursday Choir and Non-club Absences on Specific Days of the Week, Grades 3 – 5**

School Day	Thursday Choir Number of Days Absent	Thursday Choir Percentage	Non-club Percentage
Mondays	40	27.97%	25.96%
Tuesdays	32	22.38%	18.87%
Wednesdays	16	11.19%	13.89%
Thursdays	23	16.08%	22.13%
Fridays	32	22.38%	19.16%
Total	143	100%	100%

*Friday Choir* club average percentage of absences were then compared across each day of the school week along with non-club participant averages (Table 9). Like *Drumming Club* and *Thursday Choir*, *Friday Choir* had their own least number of absences on late start Wednesdays and this rate was lower than of non- *Friday Choir* club participants. On their club rehearsal day, Friday, the participants were absent the least number of all regular-start days of the week. Only 18.32%, or 26 of *Friday Choir* cumulative absences occurred on Fridays, against 19.78% for non- *Friday Choir* participants. Like other club participants, *Friday Choir* had their own best attendance on their rehearsal day. The group was absent a total of 35 cumulative schools day on Fridays, which was 18.32% of their total absences. This is less than the non-club student percentage of 19.78%.

**Table 9. Friday Choir and Non-club Absences on Specific Days of the Week, Grades 3 – 5**

School Day	Friday Choir Number of Days Absent	Friday Choir Percentage	Non-club Student Percentage
Mondays	54	28.23%	25.80%
Tuesdays	36	18.85%	19.38%
Wednesdays	26	13.61%	13.55%
Thursdays	40	20.94%	21.49%
Fridays	35	18.32%	19.78%
Total	191	100%	100%

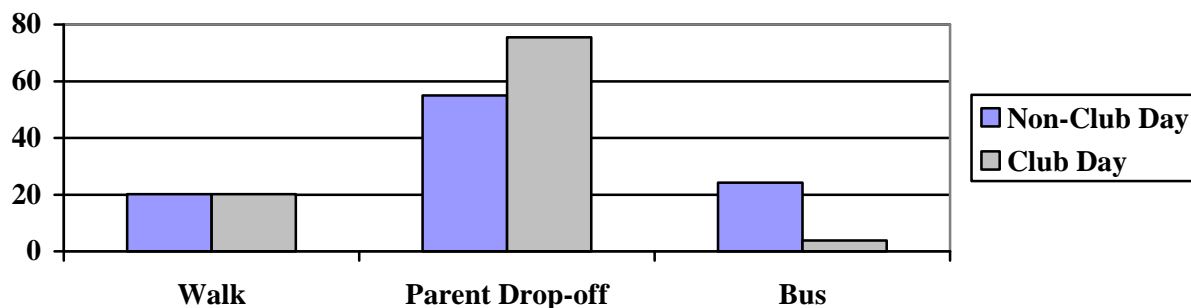
To personalize the data, and to provide one sample, the researcher tracked one individual student whom she knew struggled with attendance, to see if the data suggested that participation in a music club was linked with this student's attendance. The student, Isaiah (a pseudonym assigned by the researcher), had the lowest attendance rate out of the entire *Drumming Club student population*, yet the least of his total absences occurred on Mondays and Tuesdays (*Drumming Club* days). Isaiah missed nine full days of school during the fall trimester, 2016 (Table 10). He missed two full days on Mondays and Tuesdays (*Drumming Club* days), but missed 6 on the remaining three days of the week (50% less on *Drumming Club* days). He was further recorded as being late or tardy on the other three days of the week but not on any Monday or Tuesday.

**Table 10. Drumming Participant, Isaiah, Average Daily Attendance Breakdown**

Day	Absent	Late	Tardy
Mondays	1		
Tuesdays	1		
Wednesdays	2		1
Thursdays	2		2
Fridays	2	2	1
Total	8 (9)	2	4

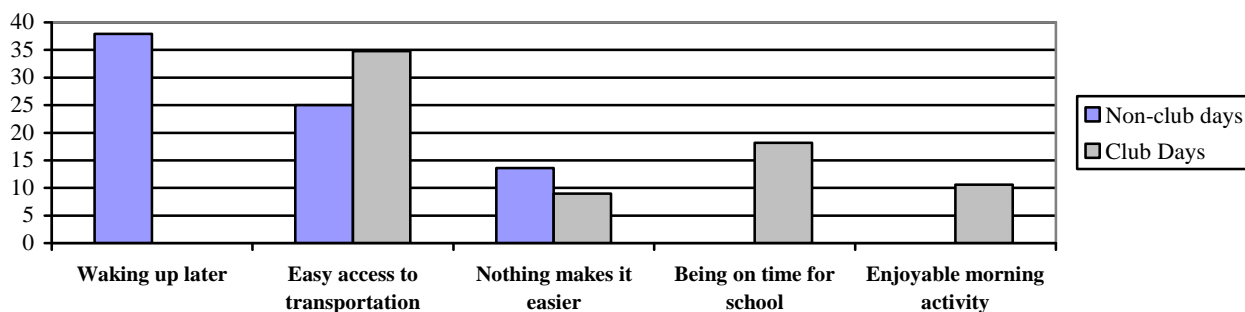
### Survey Results

Analysis of survey results explored (1) what means of travel club participants use to attend school, (2) what makes it easy or difficult for club participants to attend school and (3) what club participants like, dislike and feel about attending school and about attending before-school music clubs. In order to explore the first matter pertaining to mode of travel, the first and second questions in the survey asked how students travel to school on club days and non-club days. The results showed that on non-club days, 55% of club students report traveling to school by car, with 20% walking and 24% taking the bus. However, on club days, 75% of club students reported relying on parents to drive them to school. The same students who reported walking to school (20%) on non-club mornings also reported walking to school on club mornings.

**Table 11. Mode of Transportation to School**

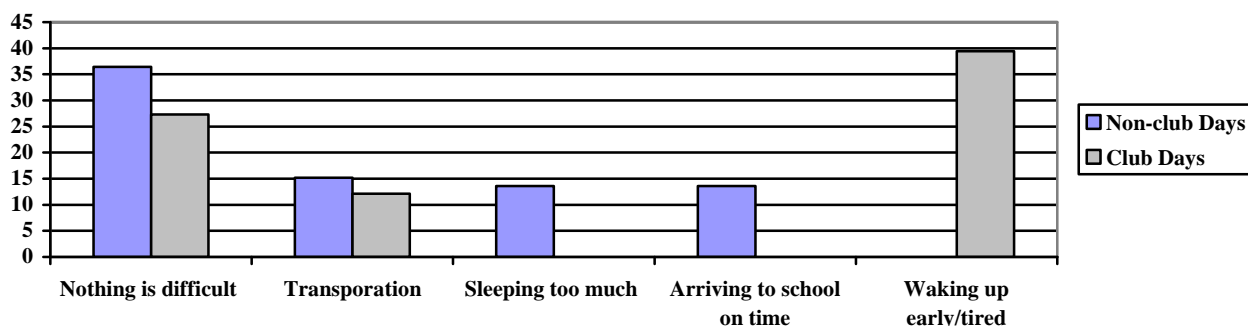
In exploring the second matter of what makes it easy or difficult to attend school, survey questions three and four referred to reporting ease of access in attending school on music club days and on non-club days. Reporting on non-club days, almost 38% of student responses stated that waking up later made it easier to come to school. An example of a statement is “I don’t have to wake up really early in the morning.” Approximately 26% of students said that having access to transportation made getting to school easier and one student wrote, “I have time to get ready to go to the bus stop.” Finally, 14% said that nothing is easier about getting to school on non-club days.

Regarding club days, 35% of students expressed that transportation made getting to before-school music clubs easy. In addition, 18% of students remarked that having *Choir* or *Drumming Club* guarantees that they will make it to their homeroom class on time. One student wrote, “We are already at school so we just walk to our class.” Approximately 11% of surveyed students noted that having *Choir* or *Drumming Club* in the mornings provided an enjoyable morning activity that made it easier to come to school. One explained, “It wakes me up and so I don’t be [sic] at home doing nothing.”

**Table 12. What Makes School Attendance Easy**

Survey questions five and six asked the students to identify difficulties pertaining to school attendance on club days and non-club days. Regarding non-club days, 36% of students wrote that nothing is difficult about attending school, while 15% identified transportation as being difficult or unpredictable. For example, one student wrote, “the bus is sometimes early + [sic] sometimes late” while another student explained his/her transportation difficulty as being “getting used to the schedule for my parents.” 14% of the students explained that their difficulty is that they wake up too late and another 14% of students expressed that arriving to school on time is challenging, but did not explain why. 14% of students expressed that (unexpectedly) sleeping more on non-club mornings can make them tired and late to school.

Regarding club days, 39% of surveyed students said that having to wake up earlier makes it difficult to attend *Choir* or *Drumming Club*. 27% of students reported that nothing makes it difficult to attend on club days and another 12% expressed facing transportation issues on club days.

**Table 13. What Makes Attending School Difficult**

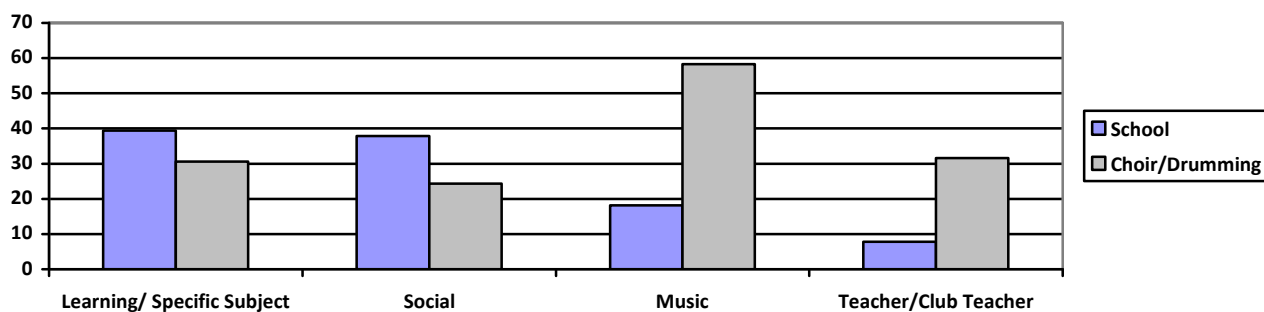
Exploration of the third matter concerned what students like, dislike and feel about attending school and music club. Survey questions seven and eight asked students to articulate what they like about attending school and about attending *Choir/Drumming Club*. Regarding attendance at school, some students listed several things that fell into different categories so the cumulative percentages come to a total of over 100%. For example, 39% of student responses included their like of learning/school in general or their like of specific subjects like “math” “library,” and “P.E..” Many students used the term “love” in their responses, rather than “like.” 37% of survey responses referenced liking the social aspects of school. For example, one student wrote, “I like seeing my friends, rescess [sic], and lunch.” 18% of survey responses made mention of liking music (a weekly general music class does occur during the regular school day).

In reference to what students like about attending before-school clubs, 64% of the responses referenced liking singing, drumming, or music learning. 24% of students mentioned liking the social aspect of seeing friends in before-school music clubs. For

example, one student wrote, “I like that I get to hang with my friends before-school.”

Finally, 14% of responses highlighted their liking of the club teacher.

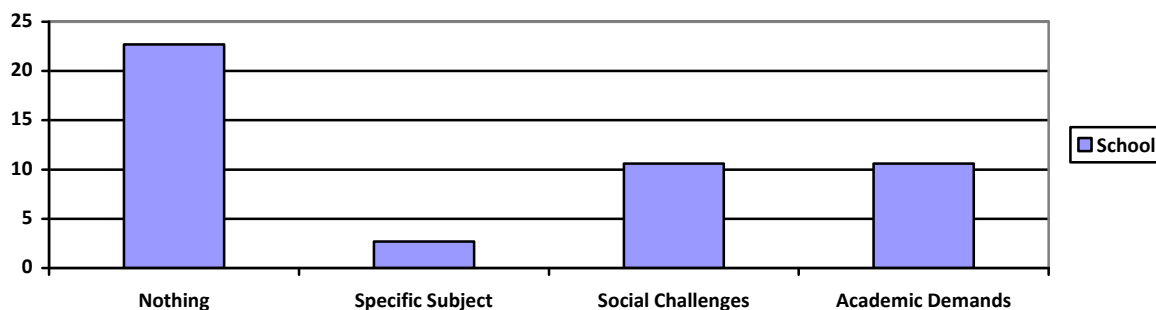
**Table 14. What Students like about Attending**



Question nine and ten asked students to describe anything they don't like about school or about the music clubs. Analysis of the responses pertaining to school in general determined that 23% of students explained there is nothing they dislike about school. 23% of students mentioned not liking specific subjects (e.g. “math”, “CKLA (language arts curriculum),” “reading” and “writing”). 11% of student referenced not liking social challenges (e.g. bullying). One student wrote, “People being mean + [sic] saying bad words to eachother [sic]. I also hate when [sic] people make fun of shoes.” 11% of students also expressed dislike for academic demands. For example, one student specified “have work to do” and another described feeling “rushed with asignments[sic].”

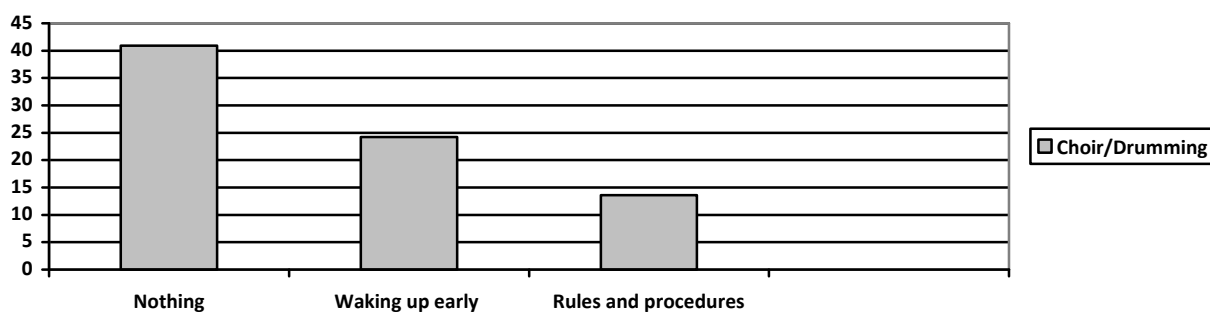


**Table 15. What Students don't like about Attending School**



Analysis of responses to what they disliked about before-school music clubs determined that 41% of students specifically stated “nothing.” 24% of students reported not liking the fact that they have to wake up early. 14% of students mentioned not liking certain rules and procedures of the rehearsal. For example, one student wrote, “I don’t like that we have to sit in a circle”, while another student wrote, “That it’s only once a week. I would rather it be at least 2 [sic] a week.”

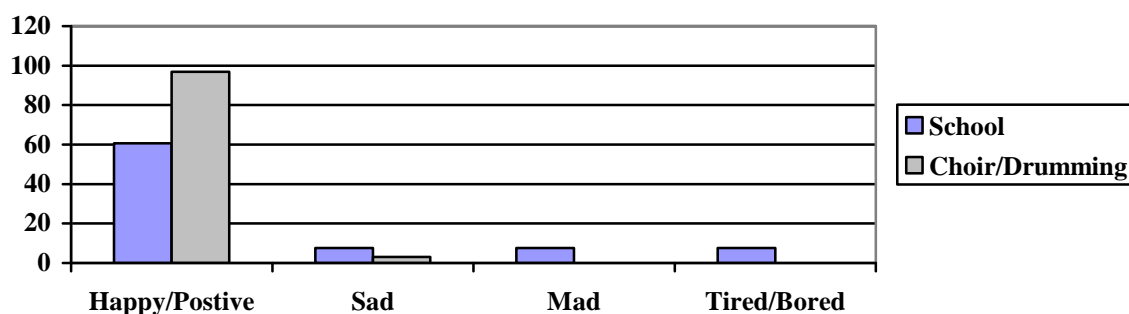
**Table 16. What Students don't like about Attending Choir/Drumming**



Questions eleven and twelve asked the students to identify their feelings pertaining to attending school and *Choir/Drumming Clubs*. 60% of students shared that they have positive feelings about attending school. For example, a student wrote “happy because we

have friends” and another wrote “I LOVE school!” In contrast, 7% of students specified feelings of sadness, 7% expressed feelings of anger and 7% referred to boredom (e.g. one stated “it can be boring sometimes”). Regarding their feelings about the music clubs, 94% of students shared having happy or positive feelings when they attend *Choir* or *Drumming Club*, one stating, “It makes me feel relaxed [sic].” The three students (6%) who did not list positive feelings in *Choir* or *Drumming Club* left this answer blank, apart from one who reported being “sad.”

**Table 17. Students’ Feelings about Attending**



### Summary of Results

The results indicate that music club participation is linked to school attendance. Students who participated in before-school music clubs at this Pacific Northwest elementary school had better attendance than the rest of the school by being absent an average of fewer days during fall trimester, 2016. The average days missed in fall trimester for all third- to fifth-grade students was 4.189. The *Drumming Club* students were absent an average of 3.214, *Thursday Choir* students an average of 3.078, and *Friday Choir* students an average of 4.178 days in the trimester. *Drumming Club* and *Thursday Choir* averages were almost

one day fewer than *Friday Choir* and the third- to fifth-grade student average. *Friday Choir* students had a similar absence average than the total third- to fifth-grade student population.

All third- to fifth-grade students at the elementary school, including club members, had the best attendance on Wednesdays when the school started 95 minutes later than usual, to accommodate teacher meetings. Clubs took place on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 8:15 a.m. to 8:45 a.m., when school began at 9:00 a.m. Club participants were absent the least on their own club day(s) rather than on other the other regular-start days of the week. Percentage of club participant total absences were lower on their club day(s) than the percentage of total absences of non-club third- to fifth-grade students on each of those same days.

The survey results found that students involved in music clubs reported having more parent transportation on club days than on non-club days (about a quarter using the bus on school days and a fifth always walking, regardless of club). Aspects reportedly making school attendance easier or difficult mostly pertained to time of waking up, access to transportation, and feelings regarding club activities. Regarding specifics of likes/dislikes and feelings, 60% of student responses listed happy or positive feelings towards school and 93% towards *Choir/Drumming Clubs*. When listing what they liked about school, categories emerged that pertained to learning, social aspects and music. For clubs, students wrote that they liked singing/drumming/music social aspects and the club teacher. Students reported disliking as “nothing”, specific subjects, social challenges, and academic demands at school. Pertaining to music clubs, students mentioned “nothing”, waking up early, and

rules/procedures of the rehearsal as things they disliked. Regarding feelings towards attending school, 60% of students reported positive feelings, and less than 10% mentioned sadness, anger and boredom. Regarding music club attendance, only one student reported feeling sad and all the other comments pertained to happy or positive feelings (94%).

## Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion and Conclusion

### Summary

The purpose of this action research was to determine possible links between participation in before-school music club and school attendance at one elementary school in the Pacific Northwest of the USA. Analysis of the data indicates that such links do exist. Results discussed in Chapter 4 outlined the average number of absences (in fall trimester 2016) for each grade level of club participants, the entire kindergarten- to fifth-grade student population, for the entire third- to fifth-grade student population, and non-club participants. The results showed that the third- to fifth-grade music club participants missed less school days on average than the kindergarten- to fifth-grade student population, less than the average entire third- to fifth-grade student population, and less than the third- to fifth-grade non-music club participants.

There is no early school bus service available. The survey results reflected that students involved in music clubs reported having more parent transportation on club days than on non-club days, (about a quarter using the bus on school days and a fifth always walking). Aspects reportedly making school attendance easier or difficult mostly pertained to time of waking up, access to transportation, and feelings regarding club activities. Regarding specifics of likes, dislikes and feelings, 60% of student responses listed happy or other positive feelings towards school and 93% towards *Choir/Drumming Clubs*. Likes of school reportedly pertained to learning, social aspects, and music. For clubs, likes related to singing/drumming/music, social aspects, and the club teacher. Dislikes of school were

reported as “nothing”, specific subjects, social challenges, and academic demands. Pertaining to music clubs, dislikes mentioned were “nothing”, waking up early, and rules/procedures of the rehearsal. Regarding feelings towards attending school, 60% of students reported positive feelings, and less than 10% mentioned sadness, anger, and boredom. Regarding music club attendance, only one student reported feeling sad and all other comments were happy or positive feelings (94%).

### **Discussion of Outcomes**

The average absence rate of third- to fifth-grade students being determined at 4.189 school days in the 2016 fall trimester can be viewed in relation to the previously-mentioned statement that this Pacific Northwest elementary school had the lowest attendance rate in the district and continued to struggle with attendance. Furthermore, it is viewed in the context of there being a high percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch. The average absence rates for the entire school (kindergarten-through fifth-grade) was even higher (4.365). Specifically, the greatest difference in attendance was determined in *Thursday Choir* participants who had an absence average of 3.078 absences during the quarter. The second greatest difference was determined in *Drumming Club* participants, who had an average of 3.214 absences and the group with the smallest difference was the *Friday Choir*, which had an average of 4.173 days absent. These results, which pertained to a range of issues, including late arrivals, early departures, etc., are most encouraging in this action research project, as they provide solid evidence that music club participation is linked

positively with school attendance. They also align with the researcher's informal observations of attendance rates of the students and the roll call that she takes at the clubs.

When looking at average absences of an entire school day (not including late arrivals, early departures, etc.), club participants continued to have better attendance than non-participants. The third- to fifth-grade non-participants missed an average of 2.58 full school days, while club participants missed an average of 2.28 full school days. Again, this is a most encouraging result linking music club participation with positive school attendance. This time, the greatest difference was seen in the *Drumming Club* participants who meet twice a week, missing an average of only 1.80 full school days, the next being *Thursday Choir* participants with 1.95 days of average absence, and *Friday Choir* participants with an average of 2.42 days absent. It appears that participating in more club days a week is linked with better full-day attendance rate, giving more incentive towards encouraging student club participation on multiple days of the week. These results align with the literature showing positive attendance linked with music programs (WA OSPI, 2017; Johnson & Memmott, 2006; Harris Interactive Inc., 2006). The fact that these clubs are taking place in an elementary school further aligns with the suggestion by Smith (2008) that such programs should begin at the elementary stage.

Looking at specific days of the week, whatever absences third- to fifth-grade students did have, on average these occurred less on their club days than other days. This is an encouraging result. While they still tend to be sometimes absent on other days, this provides further evidence that club participation is linked to school attendance. The

consistent result of *Drumming* students being absent 19.56% of their total absences on Mondays and *also* on Tuesdays (club rehearsal days), provides more evidence of a stable positive link between club attendance and attendance. In comparison, non-participants were absent 26.76% of their total absences on Mondays and 19.27% (only slightly higher than *Drumming Club* students) on Tuesdays. The researcher suggests that non-participant students may find Mondays a more challenging day regarding attendance immediately after a weekend. She imagines that there may be multiple such challenges involved and would like to see further research in this area. *Thursday Choir participants* were absent 16.08% of their average absences on Thursdays, considerably lower than non-club participants' 22.13%. A smaller difference was noted in the *Friday Choir participants* who had 18.32% of their total absences on Fridays, compared with non-club participants' 19.78%. In both the cumulative average days and in the percentage within days of the week, the least difference was shown to be in the *Friday Choir*. While the link was still positive, the researcher suggests that there may be causal attendance factors pertaining to Fridays that would be worth investigating, such as possible end-of-week tiredness and stress. Some students may not have the energy to make it to the end of the week. Another reason why *Friday Choir* may have a higher absentee rate than the other two clubs is that it had three specific students with extremely high absence rates, raising the overall average. One student missed 15.5 days in the quarter, another 20.5, and another 26, each due to extreme health or family-related challenges. Excluding these three students, the *Friday Choir* cumulative absence rate without these three students was 3.10, significantly less and much more relatable to



*Drumming Club* and *Thursday Choir* (Table 18). The researcher was happy to know that the three before-school clubs had a similar attendance ratio that was significantly less than the third- to fifth-grade student average without the three outlying students and their unforeseeable circumstances.

**Table 18. Specific Friday Choir Students' Absence**

Club	Average Cumulative Absence
<i>Thursday Choir</i>	3.078
<i>Drumming Club</i>	3.214
<i>Friday Choir</i>	4.173
<i>Friday Choir*</i>	3.10

*\*This number does not include three students with significantly higher absence rates due to health or family related challenges. The three students missed 15.5, 20.5, and 26 cumulative school days.*

It is interesting to note that all third- to fifth-grade students, whether club participants or not, had the best cumulative average attendance on Wednesdays. As mentioned previously, this is the one day of the week when the researcher could not host a club due to teacher meetings and, because of these meetings, school started ninety-five minutes later for students. Through informal observation, it seems that the later start appears helpful for both students and families. The researcher therefore suggests that the school district look into possible values in having later school start times throughout the week. On the other hand, it is also interesting to note that, even though 39% of students expressed dislike about arriving early for music clubs, they attended anyway, showing that their motivation to attend club overcame any challenges posed by the early start.

Even though Isaiah had the most absences of all the *Drumming Club* participants, the researcher found it encouraging that he did not have any tardies, early dismissals, or late

arrivals on club days (Monday and Tuesday). He also had 50% less absences on club days than he did the rest of the week. This is further evidence that clubs may be a motivating factor for him and possibly other students as well. The researcher enjoyed having Isaiah in *Drumming Club*, noting that, despite his being in the lowest of the three grades, he was committed to learning complicated parts and kept up with the older students. Isaiah always came to club with a smile on his face. His joy and engagement with the music was evident as he swayed his head back and forth to the beat as he played. It was a pleasure to have him in the club.

The survey results pertaining to mode of travel indicated some interesting points for discussion. The fact that the students who walked on non-club days also walked on club days is most likely because the students lived close enough to school that district transportation did not include them in their bus routes. On club days, participants could not ride the bus because there was no early bus offered. This is most likely why 76% students were dropped-off at school only club days, as opposed to just over half on other days. The one student who listed using the bus on club days clearly made an error in reporting. The researcher feels very fortunate to have the support of the parents and guardians who gave students a ride to club, especially of the 26% who normally had their student take the bus. The 3.8% of students who listed taking the bus on club days must have misunderstood the survey question because the bus dropped students off after club time.

When expressing difficulties about attending choir or drumming, almost 40% of club students mentioned that waking up earlier was difficult. This does not surprise the

researcher, considering that on average, all third-to fifth grade students had the best attendance on late-start Wednesdays. Unexpectedly, 14% of students mentioned that sleeping in on non-club days made it *more* difficult to get out of bed and arrive at school on time as they felt more tired and sluggish from sleeping more. The researcher finds it humorous that this smaller percentage of students feel the opposite of most of the other club participants. Whether they enjoy sleeping in or not, 20% of students expressed feeling relief that, because of club, they are already on time for school. The danger of being tardy is clearly a stress factor for them on other days. It was encouraging to see that 10% stated (unprompted by a question pertaining only to ease or difficulty of getting to school) that before-school music clubs were an enjoyable morning activity. It is important to note that the researcher did not predetermine the survey categories for her analysis of the data. For each survey question, the categories emerged on their own through the commonalities of student responses.

The researcher was disappointed to see reports of bullying, but she had expected this might be happening, at least to a small degree, despite concerted efforts of administrators and teachers to remove all bullying from the school. This is an area of concern in which the school continues to work committedly, so that no child experiences bullying. In a school with a high percentage of students from low-income families, the researcher was sad to read a report about ridicule related to shoes. Many families may not be able to afford smart shoes and she is determined to discuss this matter with the administration so that a united effort can be made to avoid such student behavior on the one hand and, on the other hand, to see if

families can be given better access to low-cost shoes. The researcher was happy that there were no reports of bullying or other social challenges during club time. She believes this is due to her efforts of trying to create a safe classroom environment for students to learn, enjoy, find self-worth, and build relationships, as advocated by Maslow (1943) and Southgate & Roscigno (2009).

Student survey responses did not mention social problems like bullying during before-school clubs, possibly because of the researcher's inclusion of music from different cultures and her fostering of respect for cultural diversity in the classroom. *Drumming Club* curriculum included music from Africa, Latin America, as well as American Drumline. *Thursday Choir* and *Friday Choir* learned American folk songs, American choral literature, as well as music from many different cultures, such as Calypso, Swahili, Hebrew, Spanish, and Zambian musical styles. By teaching traditional American folk songs, choral works, and drumline repertoire, the researcher aimed to give the students a strong sense of the musical culture from the country in which they live. Teaching music from other cultures like Africa, and Latin America, the researcher hoped to bridge the gap between students and various other cultures throughout the world (Brown et al., 2009). The researcher suggests that providing students with a respectful experience of a wide variety of music cultures may have contributed to before-school club students' overall acceptance of other students and a lack of bullying.

When looking at student responses about what they didn't like about clubs, the researcher realized that if students had shared these concerns with her during club time, she

could have helped to solve these discomforts earlier in the year. For example, one student shared that “don’t like how we have to sit in a circle.” The researcher realizes that sitting on the floor may be awkward for 10-year-olds, but she currently does not have enough chairs for all choir students. She plans to work with the custodian to see if there are any extra chairs in storage for the students to use or find a way to obtain new chairs. Several other rules and procedures that students mentioned about school in general, such as “not being able to walk in the hallways” are school procedures that are out of the researcher’s control. Students are required to enter through the outside classroom door so the classroom teacher can greet all students at one entrance.

The researcher finds it concerning that some students mentioned they were mad, sad, or bored at school. She believes it is important to be aware of how students come to school burdened with their own feelings and she plans to find a way for students’ individual voices to be heard. This could mean leaving more time for open discussion, providing a comment box, or allowing students to stay after club during the transition to class to assist them with making an appointment with the school counselor.

It is encouraging to see that most students report enjoying school and music club. Several students used the term “love” when describing their friends, teachers, and music. This suggests that the positive reasons for attending school and clubs are strong enough to outweigh the difficulties. The 93% of students reporting positive feelings toward their music club provides further descriptive evidence that their positive experiences of club might possibly impact increased school attendance on club days. The results align with the

literature indicating positive socio-emotional benefits for at risk students through arts programs (Brown et al., 2009; Southgate & Roscigno, 2009; Davis, 2009). Further research might confirm possible motivational factors impacting a causal relationship between club participation and attendance at this school.

### **Implications for Music Education**

This action research determines that before-school music clubs are linked to student attendance at this mostly low-income student population elementary school. It provides strong evidence for this school to consider possibly expanding student access to before-school music clubs. While the results are not generalizable, they may provide valuable information for administrators, school principals, and music teachers in other schools and districts in considering implementation of similar programs in their schools.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The researcher recommends that further research investigating the causal relationship between music clubs and attendance at this school. She also suggests similar studies conducted at other schools help to build stronger evidence in the field. She proposes that if this school started at 8:25 a.m. (like other elementary schools in the district), club start time would have to start at 7:40 a.m. and the earlier time might present further obstacles. Therefore, she suggests that further studies investigate the most optimal times for families in facilitating attendance at before-school music clubs.

The researcher also recommends that the school administer a student-interest survey before choosing the focus of before-school music clubs in future. Choir and world music

drumming were areas in which the researcher is well-qualified and comfortable teaching, hence these were clubs that she decided to offer. However, she suggests that research be conducted in which students are surveyed on their specific music club interests.

Furthermore, she suggests that further research determine whether implementing clubs of student choice might inspire even further motivation for students to come to school early over other types of clubs.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study indicate links between music club participation and school attendance. Based on these results and results of the survey analysis pointing towards overall student enjoyment of music clubs, the researcher has decided to continue the program in the following years. She is pleased that the school and district have changed the researcher's contractual start time to include these before-school clubs. The researcher plans to provide a third- to fifth-grade student music interest survey, to see if there are any other types of music clubs in that students may be interested in. The researcher hopes the encouraging trend in attendance data will continue to be demonstrated as she fosters a positive learning environment that motivates students to come to school, improving their attendance for years to come.

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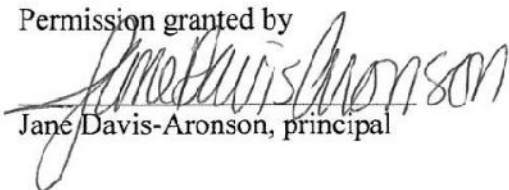
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**Appendix A:**

## Site Permission Letter

With this letter, I grant Katie Brizuela, music teacher at Daffodil Valley Elementary School in the Sumner School district, permission to conduct a study collecting student numerical attendance data. This numerical attendance data will be used to compare attendance of 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> grade students who participate in before school choir and drumming programs with the attendance data of 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> grade students not participating in these programs. Permission is also given to administer an anonymous attendance survey administered to students involved in before school choir and drumming programs. This study is a fulfillment of Eastern Washington University Masters of Music degree done under the supervision of instructor, Dr. Sheila Woodward.

Permission granted by

  
Jane Davis-Aronson, principal  
Date

**Appendix B:**  
Parents' Informed Consent Form

Department of Music, Eastern Washington University

**INFORMED CONSENT FOR NON-MEDICAL RESEARCH**  
**PARENTAL PERMISSION**

\*\*\*\*\*

DVE Choir and Drumming Attendance Survey

Researcher: Katie Brizuela – Music Teacher – Sumner School District –  
[katie\\_brizuela@sumnersd.org](mailto:katie_brizuela@sumnersd.org)

Dear Choir and Drumming Families,

I am currently in my second year of Eastern Washington University's Masters of Music Education program. Go Eagles! Part of the requirements of finishing the program is completing a Thesis project. After much thought, I decided to research the impact of before-school elementary music programs on student attendance based on our very own DVE Choir and Drumming Ensemble programs.

**Purpose and Benefits**

The purpose of this study is to research anonymous student thoughts on participation in before-school choir or drumming ensemble, and on their school attendance. The data collected will be shared with Eastern Washington University, Sumner School District, and interested music teachers.

**Procedures**

With your consent and student willingness, participants will be given an anonymous 12 question survey. Once a student finishes their survey, they will be asked to flip the survey over and review their ensemble music quietly. Once all surveys are completed they will be turned in upside down I cannot see their answers. At no time will your student's name be assigned to a survey. The information presented will be completely anonymous.

**Risk, Stress or Discomfort**

Due to the nature of this anonymous 12 question survey, I do not anticipate choir/drumming students to encounter any risk, stress or discomfort. However, if your student does experience these feelings they can chose not to complete the survey.

### Other Information

If you and your student are willing to help me in my research by answering survey questions, please sign and return to me by March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. Please know that you and your student have the right to not participate in this study and have the ability to withdraw at any stage in the process. If you and your student decide not to participate in the survey questions, students will be asked to practice their music while the rest of the students finish the survey.

Thank you for your support!  
Katie Brizuela

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Please keep the top for your records and return the bottom to Mrs. Brizuela*

I \_\_\_\_\_ parent/guardian of \_\_\_\_\_,  
(print name) (student name)

\_\_\_\_\_ **agree** to have my student answer survey and interview questions for Mrs. Brizuela's research project in the 2016-2017 school year.

\_\_\_\_\_ **do not agree** to have my student answer survey and interview questions for Mrs. Brizuela's research project in the 2016-2017 school year.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)

**Appendix C:**  
Participant Recruitment Script

Department of Music, Eastern Washington University

**Information Script for Recruiting Participants**

**ANNOUNCEMENT SCRIPT FOR  
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT**

Recruitment Script

Students, today during our rehearsal we will take an anonymous attendance survey. This survey is a chance for you to tell me how you get to school, what you like about attending school, and what you like about attending choir/drumming. I want you to be honest with your answers and not worry about what I think. Because of this, I'm asking you to not write your name on your paper. This survey is not mandatory and will not be graded. If you chose to do the survey, I'll give you approximately 15 minutes to answer the questions quietly on your own. If you chose not to do the survey, or if you did not receive signed consent from your parents, you will need to sit quietly, looking over your music and practicing singing/playing the part in your head. If you start the survey, but change your mind, that is fine. Just pick up your music and practice in your head. For those of you doing the survey, I will read each question out loud and give you time to answer. If you chose to work ahead of me, that is fine. You may not speak out or make any other response to questions apart from writing on your paper. When you are done, flip your paper upside down, pick up your sheet music, and practice in your head. Once all surveys are finished and flipped upside down, I will walk around with a box. Go ahead and put your upside down paper in the box so I can't see your answers and get ready to work on songs. Thanks for your help with my homework for my university studies!

**Appendix D:**  
Participant Survey Questions

Department of Music, Eastern Washington University

<b>Anonymous Attendance Survey for Participants</b>
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**Choir and Drumming**  
**Anonymous Attendance Survey**

1. How do you get from home to school on normal days when you don't have

Choir/Drumming?

Walk     Bus     Parent drop-off     Parks and Rec

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

2. How do you get from home to school on the days you have Choir/Drumming?

Walk     Bus     Parent drop-off     Parks and Rec

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3. What makes it easy for you to attend school when you don't have Choir/Drumming?

4. What makes it easy for you to attend school when you do have Choir/Drumming?

5. What makes it difficult for you to attend school when you don't have Choir/Drumming?

6. What makes it difficult for you to attend school when you do have Choir/Drumming?

7. Describe anything that you like about attending school:

8. Describe anything that you like about attending Choir/Drumming:

9. Describe anything that you don't like about school:

10. Describe anything that you don't like about Choir/Drumming:

11. Describe any feelings you have about attending school:

12. Describe any feelings you have when you attend Choir/Drumming:

**Appendix E:**  
Parent Recruitment Script

Department of Music, Eastern Washington University

**Parental Information Script for Recruiting Participants**

Thank you for coming to our concert this evening. As you know your dedication and support for your child's music education very appreciated. The paper that was handed out with the concert program tonight is a consent form to allow your students to give me feedback on the DVE before-school music clubs. With your consent and student willingness, participants will be given an anonymous 12 question survey. This survey will be done during morning club time. Once a student finishes their survey, they will be asked to flip the survey over and review their ensemble music quietly. Once all surveys are completed, they will be turned in upside down so I cannot see their answers. At no time will your student's name be assigned to a survey and the information presented will be completely anonymous. In order to complete the survey, the club participants must also give their assent. There will be no special treatment for students who complete the survey or for those who do not. The responses collected from the surveys will inform me how students feel about their participation in before-school music clubs as well as help me with my Thesis project that I'm working on for my master's degree. If you choose to give consent, extra pens are located at the table by the door and Ms. Hukee will be collecting them at the end of the concert. If you are interested in giving consent but do not turn the form in tonight, students can turn them in to me by Friday of next week.

Thank you again for your support.

## Vita

Author: Katherine Fisher Brizuela

Place of Birth: Eugene, Oregon

Undergraduate School Attended: Pacific Lutheran University

Degrees Awarded: Bachelor of Music Education, 2013, Pacific Lutheran University

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