

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

**Perspectives of Middle School Band Members on High School Band**

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the Faculty of the School of Music  
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Doctor of Music Education

by

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## **Abstract**

Student retention is essential for band programs at any level to succeed and grow. This study includes results of student surveys of current high-school students who took band during their middle school years, seeking essential factors affecting student perceptions about continuation into high school band programs. Research into band student enrollment and retention exist, yet limited resources focus on transitioning from middle to high school. Studies indicate that participation in large music ensembles, such as bands, provides social, emotional, and academic benefits. Increasing student retention across this transition could yield improved student experiences and achievement in music and beyond. Existing research combined with student survey results constitutes a qualitative thematic analyzing why students who have learned much about the basics of instrumental music in middle school band elect not to continue their studies in high school. Based on existing literature, peer-connectedness, parental support, and director rapport are likely indicators for continuation in the band. By improving band student retention rates, improvements in overall graduation rates may also be achieved.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Participation in a band offers students significant opportunities for growth and maturity during the critical adolescent years. Researchers Jared Rawlings and Sarah Stoddard found that many students reported feeling “connected to one another because of their shared musical interests and the number of hours they share with the class outside of school.”<sup>1</sup> This interconnectedness could lead to increased involvement with school in other areas, such as participation in and support of sports teams, overall student morale, and scholastic performance. Since band membership is often seen as a positive indicator of student achievement and success, improving student retention could yield benefits for individual band students and potentially improve results school-wide in areas such as school spirit, student participation in curricular and extracurricular activities, academic outcomes, and ultimately graduation rates.

### Background

This chapter provides a background of current trends in band student enrollment and retention issues in a central North Carolina public school district during the enrollment transition from middle to high school. Band programs can provide an expressive outlet for students, create positive school perceptions in a community, and develop lifelong learning opportunities for participants.<sup>2</sup> Researcher Albert Jackson states, “unfortunately, because of different recruiting approaches used by the middle school band director and the high school directors, the transition between middle and high school band programs is not continuous.”<sup>3</sup> Studies have been

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<sup>1</sup> Jared R. Rawlings, and Sarah A. Stoddard, “Peer Connectedness in the Middle School Band Program,” *Research Studies in Music Education* 39, no. 1 (June 2017): 121.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Albert L. Jackson, “The Effect of an Attrition Intervention Program on Middle School Band Students: An Action Research Study,” Order No. 10253326, Capella University, 2017, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 3.



conducted concerning band enrollment, but research on this critical transition is somewhat limited. Since high school band programs depend on students continuing after their middle school experiences, more focus on this issue could yield effective solutions for successfully growing secondary band programs.

### Researcher's Experience and Background

The area studied is Stanly county, located in the piedmont area in North Carolina. The researcher came from a musical family and has been both student and educator in the band programs in this area, participating as a band student in both county and city (Albemarle) programs when there were two separate school systems. This researcher graduated with a B.A. in Music Education with Honors from Pfeiffer University, also in Stanly County, where his father was an orchestral trombonist and Assistant Professor of Music who trained several music education graduates who taught in the Stanly county system. Following graduation, he taught band at the Stanly County School system for twenty years. During his tenure, he remained with one middle and high school band program, responsible for all recruitment, training, marching, competitions, and concerts. During that time, band student enrollment across the district fluctuated significantly in each of the four high schools.

Interestingly, during that time, two schools had the same director at both middle and high school, while two schools had different band directors. Recognizing differences in band school enrollment across the district, the researcher began seeking the factors causing these differences. This researcher's level of band director experience and intimate association with the band programs in this school district offers a unique opportunity to study band students' attitudes and perspectives regarding band programs in secondary schools.

Students that begin band must first select an instrument for performance. According to a study by Betty Chang, “the importance of each student making a suitable choice of instrument may be critical, not only in achievement levels but in retention levels of band students.”<sup>4</sup> This research explored the possibility that students perceive each instrument as having a personality. Chang noted, “these ‘instrument personalities’ might be linked to the musician’s personality and choice of instrument...[and] whether the musician’s personality plays a part in on-going satisfaction with instrument choice and achievement levels.”<sup>5</sup> Importantly, Chang noted that “students identified the sound of the instrument as the strongest influence on band instrument selection followed in order by the look and size of the instrument.”<sup>6</sup> Band directors should be aware of the importance students place on instrument selection and how an improved understanding could retain students in the program and increase their long-term musical satisfaction. Successful middle school band programs that address student experiences while enhancing opportunities for individual growth and achievement may positively impact self-perceptions, reinforcing positive self-image and encouraging continued student participation.

Peer connectedness and perception may be essential to student achievement and band class enjoyment. Researcher Jared Rawlings found that “because adolescence is a period that is marked by a shift in the locus of relationships from family members to peers, peer relationships play a role in developing positive behaviors during this process of induction to adulthood.”<sup>7</sup> The strength of peer pressure and its influence during adolescence is well-researched. Band directors

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<sup>4</sup> Betty Chang, "Band Instrument Selection by Middle and High School Students in International Schools: Personality Predictors and Various Influences," University of Southern California, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2007, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Jared R. Rawlings, and Sarah A. Stoddard, “Peer Connectedness in the Middle School Band Program,” *Research Studies in Music Education* 39, no. 1 (June 2017): 123.

should not underestimate or fail to understand how significantly this facet of student growth and development may impact long-term band student retention. Rawlings also noted, “engagement with music can be seen as having moderating functions, which have been known to reduce the negative effects of life stress.”<sup>8</sup> The friendships and relationships that develop in middle school band likely positively influence emotional and social student development. Understanding the impact social development has in constructing a positive student self-image is key to recognizing its potential impact on continued student interest and participation in band programs at the secondary school level.

In a 2013 Swedish study, researchers surveyed over 3,800 participants aged 27 to 54 and determined several factors that indicated likely continuation in playing or singing as adults. The results showed that “several significant predictors determined whether a child continued to sing or play an instrument as an adult, and many could be externally influenced, such as starting at a young age, taking music classes more than once a week, improvisation and the type of music they played.”<sup>9</sup> These externally influenced predictors provided researchers with a starting point to direct music educators interested in promoting and encouraging lifetime music participation in all students.

### Adolescence

Adolescence is one of the most critical periods for human growth and maturity. According to Gestsdottir and Lerner, “[a]dolescence is a period of marked change in the person’s cognitive, physical, psychological, and social development and the individual’s relations with the

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<sup>8</sup> Rawlings and Stoddard, “Peer Connectedness,” 124.

<sup>9</sup> T. Theorell, A-K Lennartsson, G. Madison, M. A. Mosing, and F. Ullen, “Predictors of Continued Playing or Singing - from Childhood and Adolescence to Adult Years,” *Acta Paediatrica* 104, no. 3 (03, 2015): 276.

people and institutions of the social world.”<sup>10</sup> Researcher Kate Zamboni pointed out research that “suggests that self-esteem destabilizes during adolescence, such that there is a drop in self-esteem in early adolescence and a recovery between mid and late adolescence.”<sup>11</sup> Understanding the numerous changes students undergo during adolescence may indicate areas that could benefit from improved teaching methods to meet students where they are developmentally effective. Researcher Bridget Sweet notes, “with knowledge of the adolescent way of thinking, teachers are more prepared to empower adolescent music students as they navigate issues of identity.”<sup>12</sup> Improved and expanded teacher training in adolescent development studies may enhance classroom preparedness and increase the likelihood of positive student outcomes in all areas.

Developing a sense of belonging is a core human psychological concept. Researcher Byron Graves noted that “at their essence, belongingness and relatedness are based on relationships, an idea emphasized by relationships motivation theory (RMT).”<sup>13</sup> RMT suggests that “the need to belong is satisfied by the development of close interpersonal relationships.”<sup>14</sup> Those relationships that become truly supportive “in turn encourage mutual autonomy and competence, and also prosocial behavior.”<sup>15</sup> These findings illustrate an essential facet of participating in large ensembles such as in bands. As noted earlier, adolescents need to feel they

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<sup>10</sup> Steinunn Gestsdottir, and Richard M. Lerner, "Positive Development in Adolescence: The Development and Role of Intentional Self-Regulation," *Human Development* 51, no. 3 (2008): 206, accessed June 24, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Kate A. Zamboni, "Factors Affecting the Retention of Instrumental Music Students of Rural School Districts in the Somerset and Cambria Counties of Pennsylvania," Order No. 150245, Indiana Univ. of Penn., 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Bridget Sweet, *Growing Musicians: Teaching Music in Middle School and Beyond*, First ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Byron Keith Graves, "Belonging in Band: Relatedness Support, Relatedness Satisfaction, Prosocial Behavior, and Music Practice in High School Band," ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

belong, and being a member of such a group often provides this necessary social and emotional developmental element.

This theme is echoed in anecdotal evidence shared by experienced band directors reflecting on the value many students place on the relationships developed from band classes.<sup>16</sup> These multi-year relationships often include band members from neighboring grades and classes, with 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades generally playing together in high school band ensembles; the shared experiences these band students are exposed to across multiple grade-levels increases band student exposure to additional segments of the student population in ways that students who do not participate in large ensembles, such as band, experience.<sup>17</sup>

Understanding what characteristic elements define a ‘successful’ band program is necessary to identify strategies that exist in them and to replicate that success in other programs. Researcher Maryann Capone-Raschilla found that “sustaining support and success required strong advocacy from directors...[which] provided a stage for directors to cultivate and nourish student leaders.”<sup>18</sup> This idea of student leadership is essential as high school band programs are often arranged in a hierarchical order from director to drum major to captains to section leaders. These positions provide opportunities for student leadership development and often motivate students to practice and improve to achieve rank and recognition for their positive achievements.

### Importance of Band Director Strategies

Middle and high school band directors are often required to wear many hats: “business manager, public relations manager, personnel director, marketing, and salesperson...among

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<sup>16</sup> Maryann Cecilia Capone-Raschilla, "Experienced High School Band Director Perspectives on Sustainability for a Successful Instrumental Music Program," Northcentral University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Graves, “Belonging in Band,” 4.

<sup>18</sup> Capone-Raschilla, “Experienced Band Directors,” 1.

many other things as needed.”<sup>19</sup> They must be able to promote the program to parents, students, administrators, and others. Experienced band director and author Kearns notes, “you must “sell” students on the idea of investing their time and talents in your program. In order to teach, you must have students, and in order to get students, you must sell and market your program.”<sup>20</sup>

Students are the backbone of any band program; we educators must be trained appropriately and teach them effectively. Notably, “recruiting for the band will be one of the most important things you do; if you can’t sell your program to feeder schools or inside your school, chances of your program growing are slim.”<sup>21</sup>

Understanding the factors that impact student participation in band programs can direct needed actions to solve these issues. In a 1999 study, researcher Stanley Phillips received sixty-five band director responses that reported: “scheduling conflicts, competing with interest in sports, and personal disagreement or conflict with the director”<sup>22</sup> as the top director’s reasons for dropping out of the band. Although these reasons were from students and reported by band directors, they may or may not be the actual reasons students leave a band program, according to researchers. Studies by Cannava and Phillips found that crucial factors for student continuation were

the enjoyment of performance, likes and dislikes of the music performed, attitude toward memorizing music for performance, self-assessment of musical ability, the attitude of the band director toward students, and the director’s attitude toward the band program. Researcher Mills found that “out of a hundred possible reasons why kids quit, there is really only one overall reason: not enough personal satisfaction.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ronald E. Kearns, *Quick Reference for Band Directors*, (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Education, 2011), 13.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley Ray Phillips, Jr., "The Retention of Middle School Band Students into High School Music Programs," Troy University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1999, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1.

Other research by William Hayes questioned band directors and students in various areas, with survey results showing “the most important aspects [of retention] dealt with parental, musical, and social aspects of the band.”<sup>24</sup> Directors also felt that students have various needs and that understanding and meeting those needs is vital in keeping band students enrolled and interested. Importantly, results indicate “a director must seek to know their students...to be able to adapt their teaching methods to either fit the students’ reasons for remaining in the band or be able to change the attitude of their students in a way that will change the students’ reasons for remaining in the band.”<sup>25</sup> Hayes noted that many studies have been done on why students quit the band. Still, not much research on why they continue. He explained that “directors sometimes overlook even the simplest of student needs... that may help directors retain students during critical transitions, such as between junior high school and senior high school.”<sup>26</sup> Director awareness of student needs is always essential, but during this most crucial transition time, being ‘in-tune’ with their needs can pay long-term dividends to any band program's continued health and stability.

### Social Importance

Awareness of the social importance many students place on belonging and how fundamentally this may affect their perceptions of band experiences could lead to a better understanding of how to address their concerns positively. “Students gave varied reasons for staying in the band; for some, either they have friends who are in the band or feel like

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<sup>24</sup> William Fellows Hayes, "Retention of 8th-Grade Band Students during the Transition of High School," Order No. 1422848, The University of Toledo, 2004, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Hayes, “Retention,” 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

participation is a way to meet new friends.”<sup>27</sup> Many students feel the social value of being in a band provides essential personal and emotional benefits.

Often, students describe a feeling or sense of belonging in band class, which indicates an increased likelihood to continue taking band as a class. In a 2010 study, researcher Adria Hoffman found that “students who felt rejected or less competent chose to enroll in other courses [while] students who felt successful and found unique roles within the band more strongly identified with the group.”<sup>28</sup> Zamboni found that “students will want to be a part of activities that are more popular with their peers if they believe those activities will help them fit in.”<sup>29</sup> Improving band students’ sense of belonging could yield corresponding improvements in retention rates.

### Scheduling Impacts

Researcher Steve Hayes illustrated how scheduling may impact enrollment, stating, “today’s students are involved in a huge number of activities...scheduling conflicts can keep students from enrolling in the high school band.”<sup>30</sup> Many schools are using a block scheduling model, which can limit student access. Often the number of elective courses students may take is limited due to strict graduation requirements. Also, upper-level classes offered only once a day are sometimes scheduled for the same class period as the band, forcing students to choose between continuing band or pursuing courses that provide the opportunity to yield a higher

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<sup>27</sup> Hayes, “Retention,” 1.

<sup>28</sup> Adria Rachel Hoffman, “Exclusion, Engagement and Identity Construction in a Socioeconomically Diverse Middle School Wind Band Classroom,” *Music Education Research* 14, no. 2 (2012): 209.

<sup>28</sup> Steve Hayes, “Top 10 Ways to Recruit Middle School Students into High School Band,” *Teaching Music* 13, no. 3 (2005): 48.

<sup>29</sup> Zamboni, “Factors Affecting the Retention,” 2.

<sup>30</sup> Hayes, “Top 10 Ways to Recruit,” 48.



grade-point average (GPA). Researcher Zamboni noted, “instrumental music programs can either benefit from or be challenged by the effects of these student choices.”<sup>31</sup>

### Socio-Economic Considerations

Socio-economic considerations are often among the most influential indicators affecting initial band enrollment and likely continue to affect student decisions in subsequent years.<sup>32</sup> The costs associated with purchasing an instrument, maintaining it, providing private lessons, and the effort and time it takes to ‘deliver’ students to after-school activities are substantial and likely impact band participation. Hoffman notes the peculiarities of band class as opposed to other classrooms saying, “unlike other classroom settings and common spaces, the band class moves both in private secluded spaces, as well as in public performances spaces.”<sup>33</sup> This observation of the wide-ranging exposure the band has in private and in the community is enlightening and illustrative of the band experience.

In a 2011 study of retention rates among instrumental music students in rural Pennsylvania, Kate Zamboni noted, “instrumental music teachers, in particular, must face the reality that students are susceptible to departure; pinpointing specific strategies successful teachers use to reduce attrition rates could be of great benefit.”<sup>34</sup> She found “when looking at their options for school-related activities, students are more inclined to pick the pastime that their friends pick, is deemed easier, or gives them immediate success.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hayes, "Top 10 Ways to Recruit," 48.

<sup>32</sup> Daryl W Kinney, "Selected Non-music Predictors of Urban Students' Decisions to Enroll and Persist in Middle School Band Programs," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 57, no. 4 (2010): 339.

<sup>33</sup> Hoffman, “Exclusion, Engagement, and Identity,” 210.

<sup>34</sup> Zamboni, “Factors Affecting Retention,” 1.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## School Size

Zamboni also remarked, “in districts with low student enrollment, there are a smaller number of students per grade level who may be qualified to join either a sports program or a musical activity.”<sup>36</sup> Larger school districts provide a “larger potential pool of available students who can fill a team or ensemble roster.”<sup>37</sup> In smaller schools, the high-achieving students often participate in sports and band programs, if possible, which can create unavoidable scheduling conflicts that must be addressed.

These and other factors influence student decisions regarding course selection. The band is only one of several class choices and educational experiences available to secondary school students. Since adolescence is such an essential part of human development, and middle school and high school band can be crucial during this period, understanding student perceptions of participating in band programs could lead to successfully improving band student participation and retention.

The past two years’ events have only exacerbated the drop in enrollment from middle school to the high school band. While many core academic courses have had some success incorporating virtual and online learning into curricula, performing groups such as band have struggled to maintain interest and enrollment in an environment that has provided limited face-to-face instructional opportunities. Since Covid-19 lockdowns were mandated, remote learning has drastically and negatively affected many performing arts classes in public school systems. Retaining existing students in these groups will likely be more critical than ever.<sup>38</sup> For secondary

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<sup>36</sup> Zamboni, “Factors Affecting Retention,” 2.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Phillip M. Hash, “Remote Learning in School Bands during the COVID-19 Shutdown,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 68, no. 4 (2021): 381.

band programs to survive, reducing student attrition during this transition is more important than ever.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Band student attrition as they transition from middle school to high school negatively impacts band programs and may negatively impact student achievement and learning. In a 2007 Louisiana study, “81% discontinued instrumental music by the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, with 49% of band students dropping out between middle and high school.”<sup>39</sup> Such losses can devastate band programs and may question the effectiveness of the training these students have already received.<sup>40</sup>

The middle school band experience prepares students by teaching fundamentals of instrumental music, such as proper sound production, fingerings, and playing in a performing ensemble. Importantly, it should nurture their interest and desire to continue. It is virtually impossible to find experienced replacement students at the high school level to substitute for such a high percentage of middle school band students who elect to discontinue band. Directors involved with either middle or high school teaching situations could benefit from an increased understanding of what their students consider crucial to participating in and continuing in the band.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

There is a need to understand the factors that aid band student retention. This study examines the positive elements and characteristics resulting in students continuing band into high

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<sup>39</sup> Albert L Jackson, "The Effect of an Attrition Intervention Program on Middle School Band Students: An Action Research Study," Order No. 10253326, Capella University, 2017, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 1.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 2.

school while also seeking to identify why students discontinue band during this transition. By reviewing current high-school students' perceptions of high-school band programs while they participated in middle-school band, the specific factors impacting students' decisions to continue or discontinue may be identified. Also, by identifying the positive elements and characteristics reported by students who continue band, successful strategies could be recognized, implemented, and replicated in other band programs to positively impact other students and their band programs.

Researcher Kate Zamboni states emphatically that “music educators may become frustrated when a student leaves the program”<sup>41</sup> Often, parents, administrators, and even the students are disappointed by this negative outcome. Determining the factors that affect band students' decisions to continue may represent the first step toward achieving positive and significant results in building, maintaining, and improving a band program. Before one can address any problem, root causes must be recognized and identified. Identifying and diagnosing any problem is crucial in creating the proper conditions to address its solution. Once these decisive factors are determined, answers may be articulated and solutions designed and implemented to correct them.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is essential to middle and high school band directors as they strive to make band programs rigorous, relevant, and successful for students, educators, and the communities they serve. School administrators also benefit from knowing their students' feelings and perceptions regarding the band's importance to them. Significantly, funding for the continuation

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<sup>41</sup> Zamboni, "Factors Affecting the Retention," 1.

and growth of these music programs depends on student enrollment and retention. The strategies used to increase band enrollment through student retention during the crucial transition to high school are vital to a band program's survival and growth.

Significantly, potential opportunities for student achievement and success in the high school band experience are lost if these middle school band students leave the program after investing several years in training. Understanding student perceptions, feelings, and expectations as they enter high school are more important than ever to create and maintain relevant and meaningful musical opportunities in school band programs.<sup>42</sup>

### **Research Questions**

Due to the positive impact band student retention has on program enrollment, viability, and success at the high school level, there is a need to investigate what factors impact continued student participation in secondary school band programs. Thus, the following research questions were developed:

**RQ1:** What factors affect middle school band students' decision to continue or discontinue band in high school?

**RQ2:** What strategies may be used to increase band enrollment and student retention during the transition from middle school to high school?

### **Hypotheses**

Research shows that music education can create social benefits in the school environment. Results of a 2013 Finnish study show "that extended music education enhances the quality of school life (QSL), particularly in areas related to general satisfaction about the school

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<sup>42</sup> Steinunn Gestsdottir and Richard M. Lerner, "Positive Development in Adolescence: The Development and Role of Intentional Self-Regulation," *Human Development* 51, no. 3 (2008): 202, accessed June 24, 2021.

and a sense of achievement and opportunity for students.”<sup>43</sup> Based on this data, retaining students in band throughout their high school years could indicate improved overall student achievement since all interested parties desire enhanced student outcomes, whether students, parents, teachers, administrators, or community members, identifying characteristics and practices of ongoing successful band programs could lead to successfully replicating these demonstrated strategies to improve band enrollment and student retention in other programs.

**H1:** The factors affecting middle school band students’ decision to continue or discontinue band into high school include socio-economic status (SES), parental support, scheduling issues, director rapport, and peer interaction.

**H2:** Strategies that may be used to increase band enrollment and retention during this transition include improving collaboration between the directors and band students of both organizations, creating shared musical performance opportunities, understanding the many social and developmental changes teenagers undergo in adolescence, and providing improved social interaction opportunities for rising ninth graders as they approach high school.

### **Research Study**

Identifying the specific factors that impact student decisions to continue band was accomplished through survey results of students that had and had not continued band at the high school level. The subject school district has four high schools. All secondary school students received an online survey. Those who participated in the middle school band received additional questioning. Their responses were compiled with results to create a database to identify common factors impacting student retention.

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<sup>43</sup> Päivi-Sisko Eerola, and Tuomas Eerola, "Extended Music Education Enhances the Quality of School Life," *Music Education Research* 16, no. 1 (2014): 88.

## Definition of Terms

Understanding the terms used in this study is crucial to realizing the potential positive impact band student retention can have on overall student achievement and success.

### Adolescence

Adolescence is generally understood as the human development period from puberty to adulthood. Alexa Curtis notes “that [adolescence] is conventionally understood as the years between the onset of puberty and the establishment of social independence.”<sup>44</sup> She continued, “The most commonly used chronologic definition of adolescence includes the ages of 10-18, but may incorporate a span of 9 to 26 years depending on the source.”<sup>45</sup> Both middle school and high school students are generally considered adolescents.

### Director Rapport

Director rapport refers to the relationship between the band director and their students. This may include any conduct both in and out of class. According to Grahe & Bernieri (1999), rapport consists of “our views and opinions of those we meet [and] are formed essentially during our initial encounters with them.”<sup>46</sup> Positive rapport is especially useful in cultivating long-term positive student-teacher relationships in the band. If successful, these relationships may last for the school years and beyond.

### Parental Support

Parental support is a wide-ranging category that encompasses attendance at events, emotional support, and tangible financial resources. Students can detect when parents are

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<sup>44</sup> Alexa C. Curtis, "Defining Adolescence," *Journal of Adolescent and Family Health* 7, no. 2 (2015): 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Kamisha Sherene Guthrie and Julie Beadle-Brown, "Defining and Measuring Rapport: Implications for Supporting People with Complex Needs," *Tizard Learning Disability Review* 11, no. 3 (07, 2006): 21.

actively interested in their well-being. “Parents” can include grandparents, guardians, or any adult responsible for the day-to-day upbringing of a child. This component is crucial to initial band enrollment and continued interest and retention.

#### Peer-Connectedness

‘Peer-connectedness’ is defined as “youths’ feelings of closeness and being supported and cared for by friends.”<sup>47</sup> Researcher John Adderly reported that “adolescents feel that band is a ‘home away from home,’ making this particular curricular and social context a rich one for study.”<sup>48</sup> Peer pressure is a vital component in determining adolescents’ activities and behavior.

#### Relationships Motivation Theory

Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT) states that the need to belong is satisfied by developing close interpersonal relationships. Researcher Byron Graves noted that “at their essence, belongingness and relatedness are based on relationships.”<sup>49</sup> Relationships that become truly supportive encourage mutual autonomy and competence, often with the added benefit of prosocial behavior.

#### Scheduling

Scheduling practices in middle and high school directly impact student enrollment. Many high schools currently use “block” scheduling which limits students to four classes per semester. Since band class is typically offered only one block, if administrators are unaware of potential conflicts or not actively supporting band programs, daily class schedules can create situations

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<sup>47</sup> Jared R. Rawlings, and Sarah A. Stoddard, “Peer Connectedness in the Middle School Band Program,” *Research Studies in Music Education* 39, no. 1 (June 2017): 122.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>49</sup> Graves, "Belonging in Band," ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019, 4.



where the band is scheduled when other single block classes are also offered. Also, there are significant shortfalls in total classroom instructional time between block scheduling and the traditional seven or eight periods. School counselors have an essential role in encouraging or discouraging students from continuing their studies in the band as they enter high school. The band is usually an elective course in high school. Counselors must advise students of all choice options, including graduation credit hour requirements, that may impact their course, selections-specifically continuation in the band.

### Socio-Economic Status (SES)

A student's socioeconomic status (SES) is an essential determining factor affecting band enrollment and retention. In his 2020 dissertation, William Zwickelmaier describes socioeconomic status as "the social standing or class of an individual or group, often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation"<sup>50</sup> Among other things, this affects parents' ability to support a child's musical training financially and therefore opportunity.

### Summary

Research into methods and strategies that address reported student concerns over continuing in the band is vital if band students are to realize their potential for success more fully. Not only do music educators become frustrated when a student leaves the program, but "an instrumental music program loses effectiveness with each student who is lost to attrition."<sup>51</sup>

Music educators must do all possible to combat student attrition through active methods and interventions to maintain student interest and enthusiasm. Life-long learning in the band may

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<sup>50</sup> William T. Zwickelmaier, "Music Education as a Strategy to Narrow the Achievement Gap: A Causal-Comparative Analysis of Band and Choir Enrollment and Academic Achievement of Low Socioeconomic Status Students," Order No. 27833216, University of Missouri - Saint Louis, 2020, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 6.

<sup>51</sup> Zamboni, "Factors Affecting Retention," 5.

begin when initial musical training sparks interest, which is nurtured and cultivated through years of training and performance with bands of all types, community bands, pep bands, jazz bands, and others. Enjoying band during school can positively impact student growth and development, including social, emotional, and cognitive areas. Students participating in the band through high school are more likely to positively affect their lifelong enjoyment of music-making.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

Band student attrition in the transition from middle school to high school negatively impacts band programs and may also negatively impact student learning and achievement. Current research shows factors affecting students' decisions in continuing or discontinuing band include socio-economic status, parental support, director rapport, scheduling issues, and peer interaction. The purpose of this chapter is to review existing literature regarding the following topics: adolescence, socio-economic considerations, social importance, band director strategies, and student retention.

### Adolescence

Defining adolescence is fundamental to understanding student attitudes and perceptions as they grow and mature during middle and high school. Researcher Alexa Curtis states that “adolescence is a dynamically evolving theoretical construct...conventionally viewed as the period between the onset of puberty and the establishment of social independence.”<sup>52</sup> This journal article finds that the most common definition of adolescence includes ages 10-18 but may encompass the years from 9 to 26.<sup>53</sup> Curtis discusses psychosocial theories of adolescence, physical development, and brain development. This research explores various sub-stages of adolescence, designating “early adolescence as approximately 10 – 13 years, middle adolescence as approximately 14-16 years, and late adolescence as approximately 17-21 years.”<sup>54</sup> Curtis's research acknowledges potential limitations due to individual variations in development.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Curtis, "Defining Adolescence," 2.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 4.

Nevertheless, it "explores developmental foundations for defining adolescence...and posits a theoretically consistent chronology of adolescence and adolescent sub-stages for use in research and program development."<sup>56</sup>

By establishing parameters of what constitutes adolescence, examination of their behavioral characteristics may yield insight into potential student interest in initially joining band class. Betty Chang explores one crucial area of study in band instrument selection, and her dissertation examining student instrument choice found that musicians had some similar personality traits. She cited Kemp, a leading personality researcher focusing on musicians, noting that "all musicians share a common core of traits which may be interpreted as musicianship-linked."<sup>57</sup> Chang went on to cite other researchers who agreed with Kemp's findings, though a few studies had results that were not as clear. Other studies "indicated that introversion is linked with the development of instrumental skills."<sup>58</sup>

Chang also noted research concerning student instrument choice and found that "the gender issue may be an important factor in personality and instrument choice studies."<sup>59</sup> Researcher Fortney found "that [except for] the saxophone, females tend to play and indicate [a] preference for flute and clarinet, whereas males tend to play and indicate [a] preference for trumpet, percussion, or low brass."<sup>60</sup> Still, other researchers found no indicated gender connection. As noted, adolescence contains numerous physiological, social, and emotional changes. Researchers Gestdottir and Lerner emphasized this importance as they affect family

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<sup>56</sup> Curtis, "Defining Adolescence," 4.

<sup>57</sup> Betty Chang, "Band Instrument Selection by Middle and High School Students in International Schools: Personality Predictors and Various Influences," ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2007, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.,12.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

relationships, peer groups, school, and entry into the workplace.<sup>61</sup> They argued that “these adaptational requirements are especially salient during the adolescent period...when one is moving towards ends that are yet uncertain, how does one select the best means to get there?” They considered this the fundamental adaptive challenge of adolescence.

Gestdottir and Lerner examined the concept of intentional self-regulation in adolescence. They define it as “contextualized actions that are aimed towards harmonizing demands and resources in the context with personal goals, [to] attain better functioning and to enhance self-development.”<sup>62</sup> Understanding the concept of intentional self-regulation, and applying it to the study of adolescence, may give insight into the thought processes necessary for successful musical development. As teenagers struggle to balance changes in their bodies with changes in their perceptions of the world around them, individual adolescents’ decisions to self-regulate are perceived by them as the best path forward, using goal-directed processes in pursuit of personal development.

Research shows that adolescent disengagement may occur during the transition from middle school to high school. In a 2018 study, seven researchers concluded that students’ attitudes toward academics and engagement typically decline during the transition from middle to high school.<sup>63</sup> Their social cognitive theory study explored how self-efficacy and perceived control could mitigate this decline. Self-efficacy “posits that individuals who believe in their ability and capacity to perform well, even in the face of challenges, will consider alternate

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<sup>61</sup> Steinunn Gestsdottir and Richard M. Lerner, "Positive Development in Adolescence: The Development and Role of Intentional Self-Regulation," *Human Development* 51, no. 3 (2008): 2, Accessed June 2, 2022.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Ross C. Anderson, Matthew Graham, Patrick Kennedy, Nancy Nelson, Michael Stoolmiller, Scott K. Baker, and Hank Fine, "Student Agency at the Crux: Mitigating Disengagement in Middle and High School," *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 56, (2019): 205.

possibilities rather than dwell on deficiencies and barriers.”<sup>64</sup> Perceived control involves “perceived capacity to control actions and outcomes in an environment [and] may entail commitment and effort to seek out resources and courses of action that promote that sense of control.”<sup>65</sup>

Understanding the importance of self-efficacy and perceived control may lead to a better understanding of an adolescent's thought process when considering joining and continuing in a group activity such as a band. The bodily and external changes adolescents perceive may create a strange and confusing outlook, especially when these young are just coming out of childhood and possibly feel bombarded with internal and external stimuli, choices, and situations not yet confronted. This study found that students' engagement in controlling perceptions concerning academic execution during transition years impacts that same sense of control in later scholastic performance.<sup>66</sup> The researchers concluded, “[for] educators and practitioners who aim to promote students' healthy development for success in school, findings suggest that student agency in learning warrants serious attention.”<sup>67</sup>

### **Socio-Economic Considerations**

According to most research, socio-economic considerations impact students' choosing to join the band and ultimately impact student enrollment and retention. There is a considerable expense in training, equipping, and transporting a musical student, including an instrument, reeds, parental time, and likely travel expenses for the household. Many areas of the country are

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<sup>64</sup> Richard Anderson et al., “Student Agency,” 214.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

experiencing economic stress resulting in some families forcing their student children to forgo sharing extracurricular activities such as music.

Since middle school is often the first-time students have some real say about which classes they prefer to join, this presents a unique opportunity to expand their identity construction in earnest. According to Adria Rachel Hoffman, music education has failed to recognize how socio-economic status affects musical identity construction. The profession has yet to establish a working vocabulary to identify how class impacts music teaching.<sup>68</sup> Such a vocabulary is necessary because “most people are ill-equipped to engage in the type of complicated conversation that is needed to understand the evasive nature of social class in their own lives and the world around them.”<sup>69</sup> By realizing that some students who prefer to join a band may never get the chance, this opportunity is identified for music educators to request targeted assistance for marginalized students.

Hoffman explained that socio-economic status directly impacts academic success in high school and that identity construction often occurs during interaction with the subject matter.<sup>70</sup> A large band class may include students from various socio-economic strata, and some may initially feel unfamiliar or even uncomfortable in such a diverse student body. Hoffman continued, “the band classroom is a unique social context within the middle school [which] moves both in private, secluded places as well as public performance spaces.”<sup>71</sup> This understanding allows music educators to build positive student perceptions of the band, including creating new friends and developing new abilities that lead to new life experiences.

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<sup>68</sup> Adria Rachel Hoffman, “Exclusion, Engagement and Identity Construction in a Socioeconomically Diverse Middle School Wind Band Classroom,” *Music Education Research* 14, no. 2 (2012): 209.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

By examining factors such as SES (socio-economic status), parental support, and academic achievement, researcher Darryl Kinney created predictive models encompassing enrollment (i.e., 6<sup>th</sup> grade) and retention (8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades) in the band.<sup>72</sup> This study "was to fit theoretical models of prediction to students' decision to enroll and persist in music ensembles."<sup>73</sup> By studying these results, strategies to improve initial band enrollment and retention may be explored and developed. Kinney's results found that SES became less of a factor in predicting the continuation of band class in high school, with the number of parents/guardians impacting student retention.<sup>74</sup> This knowledge can potentially assist music educators in pinpointing constructive methods of creating meaningful improvement in band student retention. Additional results concluded that "all music participation was predicted by academic achievement; math and reading achievement predicted enrollments in instrumental music electives."<sup>75</sup> This study has yielded a wealth of results available to music educators everywhere.

Extracurricular participation and course performance were studied in the middle grades by a team of three researchers whose results also indicated noteworthy declines in student academic results during the move from elementary into middle school.<sup>76</sup> The band is a class, yet it contains elements of an extracurricular activity because of after-hours and off-campus events. This study concluded that participation in extracurricular activities had been linked to several

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<sup>72</sup> Daryl W. Kinney, "Selected Non-music Predictors of Urban Students' Decisions to Enroll and Persist in Middle School Band Programs," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 57, no. 4 (2010): 334.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

<sup>76</sup> Kate Schwartz, Elise Cappella, and Edward Seidman, "Extracurricular Participation and Course Performance in the Middle Grades: A Study of Low-Income, Urban Youth," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 56, no. 3-4 (2015): 307.



desirable outcomes, resulting in higher grades and overall educational success.<sup>77</sup> The period of young adolescence is crucial to forming the basis for positive long-term personal development, with the middle school years strongly impacting future results. This research found that "the early adolescent period has been largely overlooked in the extracurricular literature (which focuses on high school youth) and the afterschool literature (which focuses on elementary school youth)."<sup>78</sup> The impact extracurricular activities have on student development may depend on the action. Researchers found music and sports associated with higher grades and greater importance placed on homework but noted none of these improvements when examining cheerleading, yearbook, or other clubs.<sup>79</sup> This realization underscores the importance of emphasizing music education opportunities in the middle grades regardless of a student's socio-economic status.

### **Social Importance**

Band functions as a class in school, yet much band time is also spent at after-school rehearsals, concerts, and competitions, and time spent together working, learning, and socializing continues through middle and sometimes high school. As such, the band allows students to develop close ties and long-lasting bonds. Researchers have studied belonging in the band, peer-connectedness, normative school transitions, adolescent hopes in transition, and defining and measuring rapport to understand the importance band may have in student social development.

In his 2019 dissertation, Byron Keith Graves noted how vital a sense of belonging is, stating, "a sense of belonging and relatedness is an important factor in helping students avoid social isolation and its attendant issues of poor academic performance, lack of motivation, and

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<sup>77</sup> Schwartz et al., "Extracurricular Participation," 307.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

behavioral problems.”<sup>80</sup> He surveyed high school students about their perceptions of the band and associated behaviors. Graves noted, “evidence of this relatedness has emerged from my observations and informal conversations where students use words like ‘close-knit’ and ‘family’ to describe their involvement in [the band].”<sup>81</sup> Graves explained that students’ sense of belonging in the band seems to increase motivation and improve music practice, which often results in socially positive behaviors.<sup>82</sup> Results such as this reinforce the relevance and importance of making the band accessible to more students, not fewer.

Graves noted, “belongingness and relatedness are based on relationships, an idea emphasized by relationships motivational theory (RMT).”<sup>83</sup> RMT considers the need to belong essential and fundamental to psychological and emotional health. A positive teacher-student relationship can support adolescents when they need it most. Research advanced the concept of a compassionate music teacher specific to music education, supporting improved connections with students and facilitating artistic collaboration.<sup>84</sup> This research reinforces the importance of music educators understanding and responding to student needs, whether musical or otherwise.

The area of peer connectedness is also essential to students’ sense of belonging. Peer connectedness can be defined as a youth's perceptions of being supported, close to, and cared for by friends.<sup>85</sup> Researchers Jared Rawlings and Sarah Stoddard found that band students often feel connected because of common musical interests and experiences during the combined hours,

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<sup>80</sup> Byron Keith Graves, "Belonging in Band: Relatedness Support, Relatedness Satisfaction, Prosocial Behavior, and Music Practice in High School Band," ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Jared R. Rawlings and Sarah A. Stoddard, "Peer Connectedness in the Middle School Band Program," *Research Studies in Music Education* 39, no. 1 (June 2017): 121.

months, and years they share with fellow students in and outside regular classroom time.<sup>86</sup> This understanding supports previous research, revealing that "adolescents feel the band is a 'home away from home,' making these particular curricula and social context rich for study."<sup>87</sup>

For those that have never been in a band, it is difficult to perceive the depth of social bonds that often form. Students likely need to realize the opportunities they miss by not trying the band. Since adolescence is a time of changing relationships inside the family and with peers, maintaining positive peer relationships likely assists in developing desirable behaviors during adolescence into adulthood.<sup>88</sup> This research showed that band members in the sample exhibited increased levels of peer-connectedness in and out of the class versus their non-musician peers.

Not only is social development an area of concern for students, but psychological stresses may occur during times of transition, such as from middle school to high school. According to 2018 research, any school transition features adjustments and changes involving new associates, unfamiliar locations, and impacting personal needs, which students consider stressful.<sup>89</sup> The three significant transition shifts are from kindergarten to elementary, elementary to middle, and middle to high school.

A successful band program depends on initial enrollment as students transition into middle school, while the high school band depends on retaining students during the transition into high school. This study reaffirms how vital a positive student-teacher relationship is in reducing general stresses associated with school transitions, creating an improved student

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<sup>86</sup> Rawlings and Stoddard, "Peer-Connectedness," 124.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Claudio Longobardi, Michele Settanni, Laura Elvira Prino, Matteo Angelo Fabris, and Davide Marengo, "Students' Psychological Adjustment in Normative School Transitions from Kindergarten to High School: Investigating the Role of Teacher-Student Relationship Quality," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10, (2019): 1.

attitude toward an adjustment to the new setting.<sup>90</sup> Since band students typically have the same teacher for several years, band directors possess a unique opportunity to nurture and develop stable positive relationships with their students. This relationship should, in turn, improve students' emotional and psychological stress as they transition through school.

Other areas impacting student social development involve the ability of adolescents to feel hopeful about a given situation or challenge. English researchers found that feelings of hope are essential to adolescent health and well-being and affect student perceptions which may impact educational success.<sup>91</sup> This feeling of hope differs from optimism in that “optimism is characterized as a general expectancy that good rather than bad things will happen, [while] hope is a cognitive-motivational trait that equips individuals with the determination and cognitive tools necessary for successful goal pursuit.”<sup>92</sup>

Achieving goals while feeling hopeful is vital during all grades, but especially at a transitional time. In 2021, English researchers studying 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> graders found that transitioning from middle to high school may be especially difficult as academic results tend to falter, and mental health issues tend to rise.<sup>93</sup> This study is designed to realize better how hope levels differ during adolescence, how hope impacts the high school transition, and how stress in school affects feelings of hope.<sup>94</sup> Overall, students' levels of hope declined just before entering high

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<sup>90</sup> Longobardi et al, "Students' Psychological Adjustment," 1.

<sup>91</sup> Ashley M. Fraser, Crystal I. Bryce, Brittany L. Alexander, and Richard A. Fabes, "Hope Levels Across Adolescence and the Transition to High School: Associations with School Stress and Achievement," *Journal of Adolescence* (London, England.) 91, no. 1 (2021): 48.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

school. The importance of this level illustrates the need to prepare educators to recognize and assist students in adjusting to high school.

The rapport between students and teachers can be conducive to a more relaxed and stable classroom environment. One definition of rapport is “our views and opinions of those we meet [which] are formed in our initial encounters with them.”<sup>95</sup> If band students have a good rapport with the director, they tend to continue and remain in the band. Researchers Brown and Guthrie noted that something as simple as friendliness to a student by a teacher could have a significant impact on the behavior of those students.<sup>96</sup> Elisa Janson Jones states, "high fives in the hallways and casual chats after school can be one of the best ways to build relationships with your students and show them that you care."<sup>97</sup> A warm, genuine smile while greeting a student by name can go a long way toward developing a positive relationship. With all the time students spend together in the band, good rapport is desirable; it is necessary.

The band may impact several factors in adolescent social development. This discussion includes research on belonging, peer connectedness, psychological adjustments, hope levels, and rapport. The transition stress, especially to high school, is relevant to band student retention and general student drop-out rates. Understanding the importance of these factors and how they impact adolescents' decision-making could improve student retention in the band.

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<sup>95</sup> Kamisha Sherene Guthrie and Julie Beadle-Brown, "Defining and Measuring Rapport: Implications for Supporting People with Complex Needs," *Tizard Learning Disability Review* 11, no. 3 (07, 2006): 21.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>97</sup> Elisa Janson Jones, "Building Rapports with Students: Online or in the Classroom," *School Band & Orchestra*, 10, 2020. 29.

### **Importance of Band Director Strategies**

As a middle school and high school band director, one must deal with several levels of adolescent development. For example, many high schoolers drive and work while middle schoolers do not. Directors must assimilate the information concerning student transition stresses and other factors and successfully develop strategies to counter these challenges. These may involve closer cooperation between the middle and high school groups and directors if they are different. Research in this area has illustrated several actions that often improve enrollment and retention.

Researcher Bridget Sweet explains that since band directors usually teach students for several years, "as music educators, we are in prime positions to provide safe places and experiences for middle school students to learn about music and themselves, free from judgment."<sup>98</sup> This freedom from judgment in the band can create a sanctuary for students during the sometimes-difficult adolescent years. She went on to discuss that not all adolescent experiences are negative. Sweet continues, "many people do have positive recollections of adolescence, especially those involved with music, [and] adolescence is a time when music students are primed to be influenced and to grow."<sup>99</sup> This more positive outlook presents a balanced approach regarding the factors impacting student achievement and enjoyment. Nevertheless, young musicians sometimes have difficulty as growth spurts give potential pitfalls for adolescent musicians as they wrestle with clumsiness and attempt to control both gross and fine motor skills.<sup>100</sup> Music educators may address these challenges with supportive actions.

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<sup>98</sup> Bridget Sweet, *Growing Musicians: Teaching Music in Middle School and Beyond*, First ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

A 2016 study examined Student-teacher relationships (STRs) as a protective factor. Researchers found that affective and positive STRs are essential in developing students' adaptation to the school environment, positively impacting both behavior adaptation and academic accomplishment.<sup>101</sup> As previous research has shown, band directors often develop longer-term relationships with students that may help alleviate some of the stress of student transitions.

Claudio Longobardi and his fellow researchers concluded that "the transition to high school requires special consideration since it coincides with puberty and with the psychophysical changes that entail and, therefore, can place great pressure on adolescents."<sup>102</sup> They noted the significance of director-student rapport on student success, stating, "the STR is one of the main factors that influence the degree to which students feel a bond to their school community, and favors... an increase in positive and prosocial attitudes in the classroom."<sup>103</sup> To effectively build on these results, music educators should strengthen bonds with their students while encouraging and supporting them throughout their secondary school years.

Band director Steve Hayes illustrates other strategies to encourage students to continue band into high school. Some of his tips include "getting to know the potential recruits, and letting the students get to know the band director, planning special recruiting events, letting the students feel needed, and inviting some of the eighth-grade students to sit in with the high school band."<sup>104</sup> Steve Hayes points to other areas that can impact student continuation in a band, such as the

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<sup>101</sup> Claudio Longobardi, Laura E. Prino, Davide Marengo, and Michele Settanni, "Student-Teacher Relationships as a Protective Factor for School Adjustment during the Transition from Middle to High School," *Frontiers in Psychology* 7, (2016): 1.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>104</sup> Hayes, "Top 10 Ways," 48.

value of creating and maintaining a good working relationship with administration and guidance counselors in developing a successful program.<sup>105</sup> This relationship is especially true when dealing with potential class scheduling conflicts that impact student enrollment. Making students feel welcome, needed, and secure may go a long way in easing student apprehension and motivating them to continue into high school band.

Ronald E. Kearns, an experienced band director and well-known clinician, focused his studies on initial, middle school band enrollment. He finds that afterschool activities create one of the most potentially challenging schedule conflicts for band students and that directors should proactively meet with coaches or athletic directors to address any potential conflicts that could impact continued student involvement in the band.<sup>106</sup> Additionally, developing a good rapport with the coaches and having students see this can be a strong positive influence. Once the potential scheduling conflicts are recognized and addressed, the band director may encourage interested students to do band and sports.

As students transition to high school, Kearns notes, "high school recruiting is most difficult; high school students are part of the work world, drive, and perform community service."<sup>107</sup> To address these challenges, guidance counselors may assist by providing student records identifying students who participated in the middle school band so that they and their parents to inform them of the benefits of continuing into the high school band.<sup>108</sup> Such access and support can be invaluable in seeking potential band students. Since competition for students increases when entering high school, having a solid working relationship with the administration,

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<sup>105</sup> Hayes, "Top Ten Ways," 51.

<sup>106</sup> Ronald E. Kearns, *Quick Reference for Band Directors*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2011, 23.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.



counselors, and coaches will likely yield improved results in enrollment, acceptance, and understanding of the importance of the band program and how it should look.

Using music education to address the achievement gap in student results is the topic of William Zwickelmaier's dissertation, where he notes, "research has shown that students who engage in music study consistently show higher levels of academic achievement in other subjects compared to their non-music studying peers."<sup>109</sup> Results such as this support previous research, but the reasons are unclear. In this study, Zwickelmaier seeks to understand if the elevated scores result from the impact of music on learning or if music attracts students with more academic potential.<sup>110</sup> Discovering the reasons for this could be helpful in both instructions and increasing parental support and involvement in the band program.

Parents generally understand that music can be critical to childhood development and lifetime learning, noting "76 % of Americans identified themselves as having participated in music education in school, over half of those saying that it was very important or extremely important in providing them with the skills of working toward common goals and striving for individual excellence in a group setting."<sup>111</sup> Knowing this, perhaps additional support will eventually be forthcoming for increased funding for the band rather than decreases. Zwickelmaier also pointed out the adverse effects No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has had on non-tested subjects, such as band. Since changing in 2015, some of these negative effects are beginning to recede. Results did show that studying music resulted in a strong correlation to higher academic

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<sup>109</sup> William T. Zwickelmaier, "Music Education as a Strategy,"

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

achievement in both Mathematics and Reading.<sup>112</sup> More substantial support for band programs may effectively address the continuing achievement gap among the U.S. student population.

Other areas of study that may yield positive results for band directors concerning the impact music education can have on students' quality of school life (QSL) include extending music classes in an after-school setting. In a Finnish study, researchers studied ten schools implementing afterschool music programs for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. These classes were taught by existing teachers and included classes already meeting as a group to avoid influencing student outcomes. Results suggested that students with extended music education (EM) tended to be more satisfied with school life and noted significantly increased positive responses to items assessing the climate in the classroom.<sup>113</sup> They gathered data using class (group) rather than individual information since any social benefits of music education can only grow if music is in a group setting and involves joint music performing.<sup>114</sup> This study began five months into the school year, so classes were well established and gave a reasonable baseline.

Additionally, researchers suggested several other factors which could contribute to QSL due to the nature of EM. Pupils in EM class (a) enjoyed attending a class with similar-minded peers with comparable interests, (b) felt optimistic about school because they received recognition from adults, (c) experienced intense emotional and aesthetic opportunities in school, and (d) may benefit from positive social effects and increased feelings of attachment through collective musical experiences.<sup>115</sup> The extent to which this research sought to eliminate interference that could taint results illustrates the importance of this study. As the researchers

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<sup>112</sup> Zwikelmaier, "Music Education as a Strategy."

<sup>113</sup> Päivi-Sisko Eerola and Tuomas Eerola, "Extended Music Education Enhances the Quality of School Life," *Music Education Research* 16, no. 1 (2014): 92.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

noted, additional studies are needed to identify what music education seems to do that is unique to student growth and learning.

A current concern with band teaching strategies concerns remote learning in music ensembles due to the COVID-19 lockdowns. In 2020, almost all schools were prohibited entirely from in-person learning and forced to begin learning remotely. By early 2022, most of these restrictions eased, but band classes were shut down for over a year or shifted to remote learning. Researcher Phillip M. Hash surveyed hundreds of directors studying how technologies, activities, student participation, and instructional challenges impacted learning in that environment.<sup>116</sup> This research uncovered significant challenges for rural and poverty-affected areas. Hash did discover opportunities directors found, such as “(a) a wider range of technology; (b) more of a focus on individual musicianship; (c) lessons in music theory, history, and culture; and to a lesser extent, (d) student creativity through composition and arranging.”<sup>117</sup> Band directors in more affluent areas generally had an easier time accessing the necessary technology to teach remotely. Teachers rated their most significant challenges in the future in this environment as creating interest for initial enrollment and retaining student interest in continuing.<sup>118</sup> Music ensemble instruction suffers greatly during remote learning.

Maryann Capone-Raschilla studied the perspectives of experienced high school band directors on what constitutes successful band programs. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of successful high school band directors

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<sup>116</sup> Phillip M. Hash, "Remote Learning in School Bands during the COVID-19 Shutdown," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 68, no. 4 (2021): 381.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 391.

to gather insights into how they achieved success and sustainability.<sup>119</sup> Directors developed invaluable knowledge after years of teaching and exploring activities and actions that worked and some that did not. This study showed that "sustaining support and success required strong advocacy from directors; successful and sustainable instrumental music programs provided a stage for directors to cultivate and nourish student leaders."<sup>120</sup>

Student leadership demands higher-level thinking and can foster interest in advanced positions later in life. Section leaders, officers, and drum major positions require high levels of autonomy and discipline. The successful band programs illustrated the importance of creating a thriving environment and increasing student participation while creating positive community relations and feelings of hope for students.<sup>121</sup> Hope for students is fundamental for continuation in any activity, especially band. The five directors interviewed revealed many methods and activities they successfully used over their decades of directing to keep the music programs alive and thriving.

### **Student Retention**

Student enrollment is fundamental to building excellent band programs, but student retention is key to the long-term survival of any band program. Several factors have become apparent while researching this issue, including understanding adolescence, socio-economic considerations, peer influences, director rapport, and parental support being most noteworthy. Understanding these factors and their importance in developing strategies to increase band student retention will be explored further.

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<sup>119</sup> Maryann Cecilia Capone-Raschilla, "Experienced High School Band Director Perspectives on Sustainability for a Successful Instrumental Music Program," Northcentral University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

Researcher Kate Zamboni stated that instrumental music teachers must understand that students are susceptible to leaving the band program for various reasons.<sup>122</sup> As noted, peer influences are powerful in adolescence. Students want to participate in activities perceived as more popular by their peers to help them fit in.<sup>123</sup> Zamboni's research focused on identifying strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness in student retention in band classes in a rural area in Pennsylvania. She noted that "different school districts have different needs, so it is essential to find retention techniques that apply to each district's unique circumstances."<sup>124</sup>

This study identified extrinsic and intrinsic rewards band directors used to improve student retention. Some extrinsic incentives include band trips, certificates, trophies, or unique performance opportunities such as honors band participation.<sup>125</sup> Intrinsic motivations were more challenging to measure, but directors responded that "students were provided chances to feel part of the group, told that they are doing a nice job, and shown that they are contributing members of the band."<sup>126</sup> These intrinsic rewards may not seem as crucial to observers, but they can positively support adolescents seeking affirmation from peers and adults.

A Swedish study expanding on the concept of intrinsic music motivators asserts that musical engagement is linked more to intrinsic motivation, with the act of performing becoming the primary reward.<sup>127</sup> This research sought to identify those factors associated with continued playing or singing in school and later in life. Results revealed that "several significant predictors determined whether a child continued...[including] young starting age, cultural family

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<sup>122</sup> Zamboni, "Factors Affecting the Retention."

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> T. Theorell et al., "Predictors of Continued Playing," 276.

background, self-selected instrument, and attending music classes more than once a week.”<sup>128</sup>

These factors correspond with those identified earlier and support an improved focus on young students as they contemplate musical opportunities in school and beyond.

This research also found that parental support was a strong indicator of perseverance in musical performance. Specifically, researchers found that parents can have an essential role in music education received through the parent, and a positive attitude to the child's music practice leads to continued playing.<sup>129</sup> Though this is a crucial factor, it is one of several. This study listed several areas “such as age at start, lessons perceived as stimulating during adolescence, home environment, parental support, source of music education, genre, choice of instrument, ensemble playing and improvisation.”<sup>130</sup> Understanding how these factors affect student continuation in instrumental music should help researchers and educators to identify and develop strategies that build on this knowledge and support continued enjoyment and involvement in band students.

Researcher Stanley Ray Phillips studied the retention of band students from middle to high school. This study found that "today's students have so many choices about leisure time, along with the numerous activities available outside the school, that band directors need to work just as hard at packaging their product for consumers as any business might work to attract new customers.”<sup>131</sup> This finding illustrates band directors' need to approach building a successful program as promotional and instructional. Student interest is as essential as learning the fundamentals of playing an instrument and performing in an ensemble setting.

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<sup>128</sup> T. Theorell et al., “Predictors of Continued Playing,” 278.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>131</sup> Phillips, "The Retention of Middle School Band Students."

Factors in this study identified students' likes and dislikes of the music chosen, their attitude concerning musical memorization, their perception of their musical ability, and the director's attitude toward students and the band program as having the most significant impact on student retention.<sup>132</sup> The importance noted about the director's attitude is noteworthy, as the director is often the public persona of the program in the community. Positive community rapport with the director can be crucial to cultivating parental support for the band program.

Researcher Albert L. Jackson developed an attrition intervention program to support middle school band students and encourage them to continue in the band in the high school setting. His 2017 study analyzed several areas, including the relationship between the band director and students, band director collaboration, support from the school and administration, and support from students and parents.<sup>133</sup> This work notes the importance of band directors creating an environment conducive to student learning and success in the overall development of a successful program.

A key concern is the perceived relationship between the middle and high school band directors. Jackson found, "Middle school band students are emotionally attached to their middle school band director. If the middle school band students can observe the middle school band director in a cordial relationship with the high school directors, then the likelihood that they will continue in the high school band increases."<sup>134</sup> These findings support other work concerning the importance of student perceptions of the high school band and its influence on their continuation in the program.

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<sup>132</sup> Phillips, "The Retention of Middle School Band Students."

<sup>133</sup> Albert L. Jackson, "The Effect of an Attrition Intervention Program on Middle School Band Students: An Action Research Study," Order No. 10253326, Capella University, 2017. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

School support is also an essential factor for band student retention. Jackson found that a measurable increase in band enrollment occurred when the middle and high schools provided support.<sup>135</sup> This support from both schools was crucial to increasing retention in the study group. Jackson's research also confirmed previous parental support results noting the importance of having informed parents, which tended to result in a supportive environment for the transitioning band students.<sup>136</sup> Jackson found that student continuation in the band is less likely without parental support. His work focuses educators' attention on the most important factors that do affect band student retention.

William Fellows Hayes's research into the crucial middle-to-high school band transition indicates "that students have a wide variety of needs [and] directors who can adapt their teaching philosophy to meet student needs will be the most likely to retain students during the transition to high school."<sup>137</sup> This statement puts the need for adaptability squarely on the shoulders of band directors to design programs that address student needs of all kinds. This holistic approach seems well suited to teaching adolescents that may need encouragement in many facets of their lives.

Hayes found that students gave many reasons for staying in the band, such as an appreciation of music, enjoying their instrument, making friends in the band, forming new friendships, and feeling involved with activities in the school.<sup>138</sup> Hayes reported that the most critical director survey questions involved parents and the social and musical aspects of the band, which many see as fundamental to interest resulting in retention.<sup>139</sup> The ability of band directors

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<sup>135</sup> Jackson, "The Effect of an Attrition Intervention Program."

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> William Fellows Hayes, "Retention of 8th-Grade Band Students."

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.



to fine-tune their teaching to address the diverse needs of students seems fundamental to engaging students for the long haul.

J. Allen Queen studied the transition from middle school to high school in adolescents identifying two types of change; “one form of transition is systemic and built into the public school system, while the other is developmental and incorporates physical, intellectual, social, and emotional change.”<sup>140</sup> By illustrating this whole student approach to adolescent education, Queen focuses on the need for band directors, in particular, to be aware of and sensitive to non-musical factors impacting student enjoyment and retention in the program.

After studying school districts that had designed and implemented successful transitional programs, Queen identified several essential points. Programs should provide activities involving all stakeholders; the transition process should be easy to repeat, adhere to a timeline, include meetings from both schools involving parents and students, determine all resources available, and evaluate its effectiveness.<sup>141</sup> This list is by no means an exhaustive listing of potential procedures. Still, it does provide a framework to consider when designing solutions to the problem of supporting a successful student transition into high school.

Other band-specific research concerning the transition into high school includes a 2018 study by Raymond M. Dandurand seeking a better understanding of how marching band participation impacts the transition into high school.<sup>142</sup> This work used an Interpretive Phenomenological Approach interviewing five high school band members three times each

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<sup>140</sup> J. Allen Queen, *Student Transitions from Middle to High School: Improving Achievement and Creating a Safer Environment*, London; Routledge, 2013, 2.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Raymond M. Dandurand I, II, "And the Beat Goes on: Marching Band Participation and Ninth Grade Transition," Order No. 13419182, Northeastern University, 2018. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Social Science Premium Collection.

during the summer before entering high school. These students revealed several common themes they perceived the band to provide, including “community inclusion, the power of friendships, personal confidence through knowledge, finding identity, personal responsibility, safety, and structure.”<sup>143</sup> These factors support other research findings emphasizing the importance of friends and community in supporting students' band participation.

### **Summary**

Band students and programs will likely benefit from a better understanding of middle school band students' perceptions of the high school band. This review of current literature highlights this possibility by examining prior research identifying several factors affecting students' decision to continue or discontinue band in high school. Exploring the most noted of these factors identifies areas for additional study.

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<sup>143</sup> Dandurand, “And the Beat Goes On.”

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology used in this research study. Research questions being studied seek to identify what factors affect middle school band students' decision to continue or discontinue band in high school and to determine what strategies may be used to increase band enrollment and student retention during the transition from middle school to high school. It is hypothesized that the factors most crucial to students' decisions to continue in a band will be socioeconomic status (SES), parental support, scheduling issues, director rapport, and peer interaction. Successful strategies to improve student participation are expected to include improving collaboration between the directors and band students of both organizations, creating shared musical performance opportunities, understanding the many social and developmental changes teenagers undergo during adolescence, and providing improved social interaction opportunities for rising ninth graders as they approach high school.

### Design

This descriptive study is qualitative in design and contains survey results. The survey portion was conducted online and is cross-sectional. This method was chosen due to cost considerations, accessibility, Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, and a desire to gather as many responses as possible for data analysis.<sup>144</sup> Studying historical data reveals significant areas of concern affecting band student retention and indicates previous studies and efforts to combat the

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<sup>144</sup> John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, Fifth ed. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2018, 149.

loss of band students. A survey was conducted to gather information indicating which factors respondents feel are most crucial in their decision to continue or discontinue the band program. It also allows respondents to express the relative importance of these factors.

### **Participants**

This survey included participants from each of the four high schools in the local school district. The survey was available online to all current high school students in March and April 2022, regardless of whether they were in a band. This district is rural and considered poor. Enrollment at each school is only a few hundred students. Fifty-one responses were collected and distributed between the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

**Table 1. Participants per grade level**

Grade Level	Responses	Participants
9th grade	25.49%	13
10th grade	29.41%	15
11th grade	25.49%	13
12th grade	19.61%	10
TOTAL		51

### **Setting**

The IRB-approved survey was conducted entirely online, with results collected anonymously. Survey Monkey was used to develop the instrument, then distributed it to each school's administration for approval.

### **Procedure**

After administrative, parental, and IRB permissions were obtained, a link for the survey was sent to each student's school e-mail address. Respondents could access the survey and input responses to the sixteen questions in the Appendix. Survey Monkey collected and graphed all student responses in clearly legible bar graphs for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Results collected via Survey Monkey were analyzed for common themes. Qualitative thematic analysis was used to provide direction for determining the students' relative importance for each factor impacting their decision to continue or discontinue in the band. Notable themes that concerned student satisfaction or dissatisfaction with participation in the band program include the importance of friends in the band and their impact on student continuation and student/director rapport, including opinions on whether having the same band director at both middle and high school could be beneficial to encouraging continued enrollment. Other common themes included the importance of family structure, whether households were one or two parents, and perceived student enjoyment performing on an instrument in either an on-campus concert setting or an off-campus activity such as a trip, ballgame, or competition.

### **Summary**

This qualitative descriptive study analyzes student survey results using qualitative thematic analysis to identify those factors students see as most crucial in their decision to continue or discontinue band in high school. An online survey using Survey Monkey was conducted involving all high schools within a rural North Carolina school district. Survey results provide a framework for identifying those factors students perceive as most important in

deciding whether to continue or discontinue in the band and identifying strategies for addressing those issues for discussion in chapter 4.

## Chapter Four: Research Findings

### Introduction

This chapter reports the results of this study and answers the two research questions. Results indicate that the factors most crucial to students' decisions to continue in a band are peer interaction, director rapport, scheduling issues, socioeconomic status (SES), and parental support. Results of this study indicate that successful strategies to improve student participation include having the same band director in both the middle and high school or, if they are different individuals, enhancing collaboration between the directors and band students of both organizations by creating shared musical performance opportunities, understanding the many social and developmental changes teenagers undergo during adolescence, and providing improved social interaction opportunities for rising ninth graders as they approach high school.

### Demographics

The students surveyed were white, 82%, with a minor majority having both parents in the household, 64%.

**Table 2. Participants household composition**

Household Residents	Responses Percentages	Numerical Participants
Siblings	68.63%	35
One Parent	35.29%	18
Grandparent(s)	17.65%	9
Two Parents	64.71%	33
Other, guardian, etc.	3.92%	2
TOTAL		97

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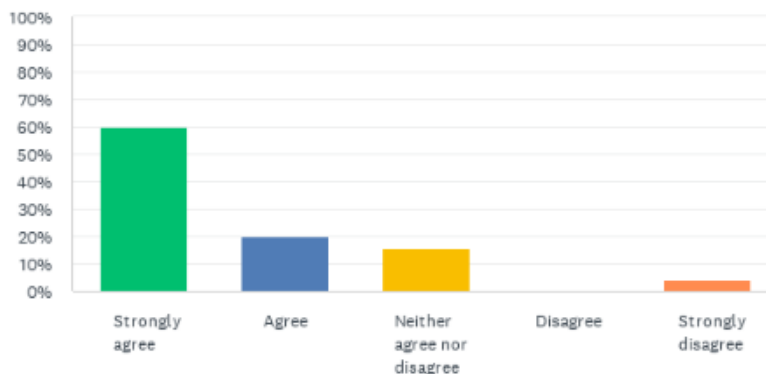
\*Note: totals more than 100% due to multiple responses.

### Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked which factors, peer interaction, director rapport, scheduling issues, socioeconomic status (SES), and parental support, are most crucial to students' decisions to continue in a band. Results of this study support this hypothesis. In the online survey, most students responded that they continued in the band into high school and gave various reasons. One student's statement concerning peer interaction noted, "hearing them talk about a band made me want to continue; now it's become a safe place for me, and it's the one class I have where I know for a fact I have a friend in there, and I know what the expectations are." An overwhelming majority of respondents, 80%, said they enjoyed being with their friends in the band.

**Figure 1. Students' relative enjoyment of middle school band class**

Q10 In middle school band, I enjoyed being with my friends

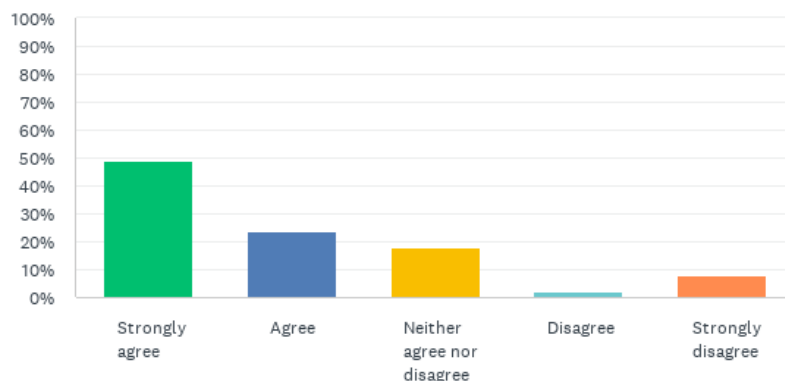


When students were asked if they enjoyed playing their instrument in middle school, 74% agreed or strongly agreed.



**Figure 2. Students' relative enjoyment of playing their instrument**

Q8 In middle school, I enjoyed playing an instrument.

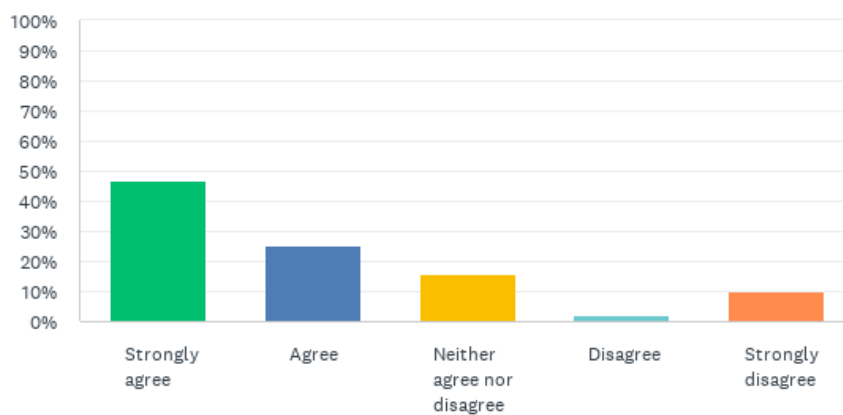


One student exclaimed, “I am still in band, and I love it so much!”

The same percentage of respondents enjoyed performing at concerts and events.

**Figure 3. Students' relative enjoyment of performing**

Q9 In middle school, I enjoyed performing at concerts and events



Concerning socio-economic considerations, one student stated, “Money was an issue in my first year of middle school, so I quit the band the first week of school due to money issues.”

Other students noted that scheduling issues and the time involved were critical to their decision not to continue in the band in high school. One student commented, “I really wasn’t that good in middle school [band] anyways, and I just enjoyed the teacher so much in middle school that I stayed and do marching band, but I’m in the color guard.” Another stated, “I am still in [the] band, but I think a big reason why others did not continue is due to fear of high school band.” Finding ways to combat the perceived fears of high school band students is critical to fighting band student attrition and improving high school band enrollment. Director rapport was indicated by many as the primary reason to continue or discontinue the band program. This will be discussed further in research question 2.

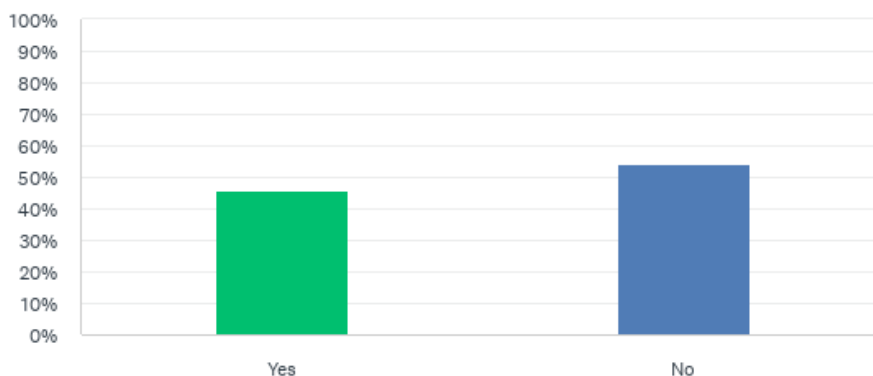
Instrument choice, racial identity, and family construction were not as influential on continuance in band class. Whether there were one-parent or two-parent households, students did not express strong opinions about parental household numbers negatively impacting continuing in the band class. Racial differences did not affect continuing band class significantly either. Instrument choice had no measurable impact on student continuance in the band.

### **Research Question 2**

Research question 2 asks what strategies may be used to increase band enrollment and student retention during the transition from middle to high school. Expected results include having the same band director in both the middle and high school, or, if they are different individuals, enhancing collaboration between the directors and band students of both organizations, creating shared musical performance opportunities, understanding the many social and developmental changes teenagers undergo during adolescence, and providing improved social interaction opportunities for rising ninth graders as they approach high school. When

students were asked if they had the same band director for both middle and high school, 46% responded yes, while 54% said no.

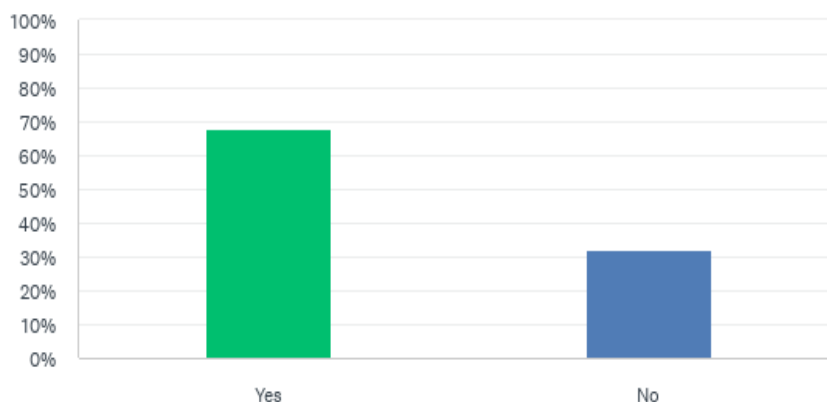
**Figure 4. Band director continuity between middle and high school**  
 Q15 I had the same band director in middle school and high school



When students were asked if they thought having the same director in both middle and high school would be beneficial, an overwhelming majority, 68%, responded yes, while 32% said no.

**Figure 5. Student responses concerning the same director at middle and high school.**

Q16 In your transition from middle school to high school, do you think having the same director would be better



This large majority indicates overwhelming support for having the same director at middle and high schools. In this study, four high schools were surveyed. Of these, the one school

with the same director in both middle and high schools consistently had a higher percentage of students continue into the high school program. This same program made marching band available to selected eighth-grade students to improve interest and enrollment in the high school band program. This director also invited all seventh and eighth-grade band students to the final home football game and to play in the stands with the high school band. These actions support the original hypothesis in research question 2 of the importance of creating shared musical opportunities and improving social interaction opportunities for rising ninth graders.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, the results of this study identify the factors most crucial to students' decisions to continue in a band as peer interaction, director rapport, scheduling issues, socioeconomic status (SES), and parental support. Of these, director rapport and peer interaction appear to be most influential to students. Successful strategies to improve student participation include having the same band director in both the middle and high school, or, if they are different individuals, enhancing collaboration between the directors and band students of both organizations, creating shared musical performance opportunities, understanding the many social and developmental changes teenagers undergo during adolescence, and providing improved social interaction opportunities for rising ninth graders as they approach high school. Of these, the most critical factor identified is the continuity of having the same band director throughout middle and high school.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions**

### **Introduction**

This chapter reports the conclusions of this study and answers two research questions. Research question 1 seeks to identify those factors most crucial to students' decision to continue in a band program during the transition from middle to high school. Based on this study's results, peer interaction, director rapport, scheduling issues, socioeconomic status (SES), and parental support were most critical to students' decisions to continue in the band. Research question 2 seeks to identify successful strategies to improve student participation. This study's findings identified strategies, including having the same band director in both the middle and high school or, if they are different individuals, enhancing collaboration between the directors and band students of both organizations by creating shared musical performance opportunities. It also focuses on understanding the many social and developmental changes teenagers undergo during adolescence and providing improved social interaction opportunities for rising ninth graders as they approach high school. The importance of these conclusions is illustrated through their relation to the existing literature on the subject matter and pointing the way forward through the intentional application of these findings.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study found that the most significant factors affecting band student continuation into high school were director rapport, peer interaction, scheduling issues, and to a lesser extent, socioeconomic status and parental support. These findings parallel the recognized factors in the limited available research literature. Results of this survey suggest by a wide margin that students believe having the same band director at both schools would be beneficial. These findings raise the value band students place on a director's rapport as a crucial factor influencing

student continuation of the band into high school. The results support Albert L. Jackson's work. He developed an attrition intervention program to help middle school band students and encourage them to continue in the band in the high school setting by analyzing the relationship between the band director and students, band director collaboration, support from the school and administration, and support from students and parents.<sup>145</sup> Previous research by Stanley Ray Phillips found identifying students' likes and dislikes of the music chosen, their perception of their musical ability, and the director's attitude toward students and the band program as having the most significant impact on student retention.<sup>146</sup> Recognition of band student perceptions of the importance that band director rapport and continuity have on success in the band program could direct school administrators to strive for the demonstrated benefits of positive band director rapport with students, parents, and the community.

Survey responses in this study also confirmed student perception of the importance of peer involvement and support. When asked if they enjoyed playing their instrument while being with their friends, over 80% of respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed. When asked if they enjoyed performing at concerts and events, over 74% agreed or strongly agreed. The importance that surveyed students assigned to peer involvement and performing music with friends reinforces previous research by Kate Zamboni, noting extrinsic incentives such as band trips, certificates, trophies, or unique performance opportunities strengthen and support student enthusiasm to increase student retention.<sup>147</sup> The intrinsic benefits of students performing music in a band setting - developing self-confidence, mastering skills, and collaborating - are crucial to scholastic success, student enjoyment, and overall personal development.

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<sup>145</sup> Jackson, "The Effect of an Attrition Intervention Program."

<sup>146</sup> Phillips, "The Retention of Middle School Band Students."

<sup>147</sup> Zamboni, "Factors Affecting the Retention."

Survey results in this study also indicated that students who continued band in high school enjoyed being with friends and performing together at musical events, though at slightly lower levels. When asked if they enjoyed being with friends in the band, 74% responded that they agreed or strongly agreed, somewhat less than the 80% reported during middle school. Still, 3 of 4 current band students rate this as a strong positive indicator of personal satisfaction and enjoyment, leading to their continued enrollment. Other research confirms that adolescent disengagement may occur during the middle to high-school transition. A 2018 psychological study concluded that students' attitudes toward academics and engagement typically decline during this transition.<sup>148</sup> To counteract this tendency, being in a band has often led to close feelings of belonging. Researcher Byron Keith Graves confirmed in his 2019 study that students used words like close-knit and family to describe their involvement in the band. This is an essential intangible that band membership often provides. He also noted the importance of relationships motivational theory (RMT), which considers belonging necessary and fundamental to psychological and emotional health.<sup>149</sup>

Socioeconomic considerations were not as crucial as the other factors impacting students' decisions to continue or discontinue band during the transition from middle to high school. These concerns were more impactful when students considered beginning band as they entered middle school. One survey respondent explained, "money was an issue in my first year of middle school, so I quit the band the first week of school due to monetary issues." By entering high school, students and their parents know what is financially expected with band membership.

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<sup>148</sup> Anderson et al., "Student Agency at the Crux," 205.

<sup>149</sup> Graves, "Belonging in Band."

Researcher Darryl Kinney did note that in his studies, the number of parents/guardians in a household impacted student retention. This was not indicated in this study. Two-thirds of student respondents had two-parent families, while one-third were in single-parent homes. The results did not appear impacted due to household arrangements. Parental support is crucial when class scheduling begins. Many parents feel that attaining a high G.P.A. may be more important than having their child in the band. Since band class is usually an elective course, it is not weighted as heavily as some academic classes in G.P.A. calculations.

Student respondents who did not continue in band in high school gave scheduling issues as their primary reason not to continue 15% of the time. This is a sizable group of students but less significant than those indicating director rapport and peer involvement as crucial to their decisions. Other factors respondents mentioned included work, too much time involved, and sports. Factors that survey results indicated were not as important included instrument choice, racial identity, and, as mentioned earlier, family construction. These factors had no measurable impact on student continuance in the band.

### **Findings Compared to Literature Review**

Existing research into band student enrollment during the critical transition from middle to high school is limited but does illustrate several common themes. Similarities and differences are apparent when comparing these commonalities with the study results. The major factors expected, peer interaction, director rapport, scheduling issues, socio-economic factors, and parental support, are generally indicated in most other research. By examining existing literature on band student attitudes and perspectives toward high school bands as affected by adolescence, band director strategies, band social support, and socio-economic considerations, comparisons with several aspects of this study become apparent.



Understanding adolescence is critical to gaining the perspectives of band students on being in the band. Researchers Gestdottir and Lerner indicated that adolescence significantly affects all areas of development, including physiological, emotional, and social. Most importantly, it impacts how teenagers relate to family groups, peers, and school.<sup>150</sup> Results of this study support their conclusions, indicating the importance band students place on peer relationships and the social support band can provide. Figures two and three indicated that almost 75% of respondents enjoyed playing their instrument and performing at events. Such strong results suggest that peer influence in the band likely significantly impacts band enrollment.

The social support students often find in a band is described by Byron Keith Graves as a feeling of belonging to a group which is the basis of relationships motivational theory (RMT).<sup>151</sup> RMT asserts that the need to belong is essential to emotional and psychological health. The results of this study confirm this. Figure one shows that almost 80% of respondents said they enjoyed being with friends in band class. This overwhelming majority illustrates the importance band students place on belonging to the group.

Band director strategies to combat band student attrition exist but need to be better documented in the existing literature. Often, anecdotal examples of director continuity and collaboration, along with a few published excerpts, such as those cited in this study, are included. In this study, respondents indicated that band director continuity is preferred. In figure five, almost 70% of respondents felt that having the same director at middle and high school is preferable. The division of band director staffing between the middle and high school levels

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<sup>150</sup> Gestsdottir and Lerner, "Positive Development," 2.

<sup>151</sup> Graves, "Belonging in Band."

likely impacts band enrollment in the four high schools in this study. Understanding the connection between band director continuity and band student retention could provide opportunities for all band programs to retain students and improve enrollment.

Researchers often cite socioeconomic considerations (SES) as important factors in students enrolling or continuing in the band. While this study did indicate that SES was a factor in their decision to continue, this was not as significant a factor as others. Based on responses, students that desire to join the beginning band in middle school must first overcome any financial challenges to begin band. As noted earlier, one student stated, “Money was an issue in my first year of middle school, so I quit the band the first week of school.” This statement indicates potential impacts on middle school beginning band enrollment more than those while transitioning into high school. Still, there is no way of knowing how many interested middle school students never receive the opportunity to join the band.

This study supports previous research in identifying the factors impacting band student attrition. Significantly, peer influence, and director rapport, were indicated as most important to respondents in continuing in the band. Understanding this, educators have the research needed to inform, influence, and persuade school and district administrations to approach band program staffing carefully.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is vital to middle and high school band directors as they strive to make band programs rigorous, relevant, and successful for students, educators, and the communities they serve. School administrators may benefit from knowing their students’ feelings and perceptions regarding the importance of band to them personally and scholastically. Significantly, funding for the continuation and growth of these music programs depends on student enrollment and

retention. The strategies used to increase band enrollment through student retention during the crucial transition to high school are vital to a band program's survival and growth.

Significantly, potential opportunities for student achievement and success in the high school band experience are lost if these middle school band students leave the program after investing several years in training. Understanding student perceptions, feelings, and expectations as they enter high school are more important than ever to create and maintain relevant and meaningful musical opportunities in school band programs.

The results of this study identify the factors most important to students as they decide whether to continue or discontinue band in order of importance: band director rapport, peer involvement, and scheduling issues. By acting on these results, music educators and administrators have a clear starting point in efforts to improve sustainability and enhance continued growth in band programs by focusing on director continuity and rapport. Either by having the same director for both middle and high school or by having the directors and schools collaborate closely on student musical development and provide meaningful opportunities to coordinate performance opportunities involving both groups. These simple yet successful strategies may be replicated in almost any school district to enhance student involvement and band program growth.

### **Limitations**

This study has valuable and applicable results but does contain limitations and shortcomings. The number of students who responded to the survey was fewer than hoped, which may have been due to lingering effects and student apathy due to the disruptions caused by remote learning and other responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many students have been less

involved academically during this period than they may have been under more normal conditions.

There may be unintentional bias by the researcher either in the questions posed to students or in interpreting survey results. Other limitations include the lack of qualitative responses or student ability to express individual opinions. Band program challenges have been evident throughout this district for decades, as evidenced by low enrollment, and this study identifies practical solutions to combat this trend. This study provides insight into the long-term evolution of the problems of band programs in this school district and how these results may relate to addressing these issues in band programs in schools nationwide and worldwide.

### **Recommendations**

The results of this study provide direction for additional research opportunities. Further studies of direct student surveys that gather more numerous responses could support these findings' validity. Furthermore, investigations into how relevant administrators perceive these findings could influence staffing needs and requests in band programs. Sometimes, those closest to a given situation recognize challenges and offer the most appropriate solutions. Other studies could focus on the impact of band student retention and its effects on life-long musical appreciation and enjoyment, along with an evaluation of music's influence on any perceived improvement in long-term personal quality of life (QOL).

Here, both the tendency and reasons why almost half of all middle school band students do not continue in the band in high school are presented, along with recommending a demonstrated successful solution where the continuity and collaboration of all band directors in a program is recognized as paramount to strengthening a program. Since student success in secondary school music ensembles such as band is often accompanied by increasing student

scholastic involvement, developing artistry through mastery of a skill set, positive self-image building, and feelings of belonging, which are deemed necessary to positive emotional development, a strong case can be made for additional program support through financial resources and intentional hiring and staffing in band programs.

The demonstrated positive impacts being in a band has on students' behavior and overall development appears compelling enough to examine further the benefits of growth in band programs. Since the problem of losing band students in the transition from middle to high school is endemic to school systems, professional development for the band directors and administrative personnel could yield positive results. Since administrators are responsible for hiring all educators, including band directors, their understanding of the importance of implementing methods to improve continuity and collaboration between directors of both middle and high schools is crucial.

### **Summary**

The problem of band student retention during the transition from middle to high school is widespread and critical. Understanding middle school band students' perceptions of the high school band is crucial in combatting discontinuation and disenrollment during this vital transition. Understanding the various emotional, psychological, and physical changes adolescents undergo and how these changes impact student development and interest in school, specifically band, is also fundamental to addressing these concerns. This study has identified the most critical factors students feel affect their continuation in the band program into high school. It indicates strategies that have demonstrated success in improving student retention and enrollment. Though this study has limitations, additional areas of study have been identified to continue and expand this vital work.

## Appendix

### Survey Questions and Possible Answer Choices

1. Are you a high school student who took band in middle school?

Yes

No

2. Who currently lives with you in your household? Please include permanent residents only. (Please select all that apply.)

sibling(s)

One Parent

Grandparent(s)

Two Parents

Other, guardian, etc.

3. Are you:

White

Black

Hispanic

Asian

Other

Other (please specify)

4. I am currently in the

- 9th grade
- 10th grade
- 11th grade
- 12th grade

5. I took band in middle school for

- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years

6. As a high school freshman, I

- took band at least one semester
- I did not enroll in band

7. I play (or played):

- Woodwind instrument
- Brass instrument
- Percussion

8. In middle school, I enjoyed playing an instrument.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

9. In middle school, I enjoyed performing at concerts and events.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

10. In middle school band, I enjoyed being with my friends.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree



11. The primary reason I did not continue in the band as a freshman was because

- Not what I expected
- Too much time involved
- Class scheduling conflicts
- Sports participation
- Other (please specify)

12. I enjoy playing my instrument

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

13. I enjoy being with my friends in the band.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. I enjoy participating in band competitions and concerts.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

15. I had the same band director in middle and high school.

- Yes
- No

16. In your transition from middle to high school, do you think having the same director would be better?

- Yes
- No

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