

TEACHING UNDER PRESSURE: A COMPARATIVE CASE  
STUDY OF SECONDARY INSTRUMENTAL  
MUSIC EDUCATION

A Master's Thesis Presented

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MUSIC EDUCATION

By Laurie H. Sklar

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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### Abstract

The purpose of this comparative case study was to investigate, explore, and describe the methods and practices of secondary instrumental music education in a public school setting. Two sites, a Rhode Island public school and a Rhode Island community music school, were chosen for observation. Two major ensembles, a jazz band and a concert band, were observed at each site on four different occasions. Observations were organized by the National Standards of Music Education, although the study did not focus on whether or not the programs “met” the standards. Data was also placed into the category of non-musical factors. Observations and analysis found that the non-musical factors, and themes that emerged from those factors, were the largest noticeable difference between the two sites. These factors also contributed to the disparity in the two sites abilities to address the standards. Non-musical factors such as scheduling and interruptions were the major issues facing the public school site, including split rehearsal times between ensembles and missed rehearsals due to assemblies. Both sites had significant gaps in their addressing of the standards, although the community music school met more of the standards. This may just be a result of the increase in time spent in rehearsal. This research opens the questions of whether or not the constraints facing public school music educators are hindering their ability to fully educate their students. Research can also be performed to gauge the perceptions that secondary instrumental music educators have on the standards.

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## CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

The public school classroom is a complicated place. With pressure being applied from all sides, public school teachers today are faced with the choice between “have to understand this,” versus “have to get through this.” This is especially true in the music classroom. While other subjects demand more of students’ time and focus, music classrooms may experience a lack of time and support within the public school day. Regardless of the complications of public school education, access to an education in music is best achieved through its scope. A projected 49.8 million students attended American public schools in the 2012-2013 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov>). Music educators will have no greater access to the school-aged population. For this reason, understanding the current public school music education classroom is crucial to discussing and reviewing current practices and roles.

Over the last two decades, research attempting to define music’s role on student performance in other academic areas has become increasingly popular. An overwhelming majority of those studies have shown that a student who participates in music, whether through a school program or a study provided initiative, benefits academically from that instruction. In addition, recent studies that focus on achievement in the “high-stakes” subjects of math and language arts have found a positive correlation between music instruction and cognitive development in both areas (Hallam, 2010; Foregard, Winner, Norton, & Schlaug, 2008; Piro & Ortiz, 2009; Huber, 2009; Southgate & Roscigno, 2009;

Shaw, 2004; Harris, 2007). These results are congruent with similar studies showing a positive correlation between music participation and standardized test scores (The College Board & MENC, 2001; Babo, 2004; Vaughn & Winner, 2000; Kluball, 2000; Helmrich, 2010). Many studies concluded that music was beneficial for all students regardless of their socioeconomic status (Catterall, 1998; Kinney, 2008; Miksza, 2007; Fitzpatrick, 2006).

While these results are an important part of the public school music education discussion, it is important for me to note my belief in the non-tangible successes of music. A knowledge of, and passion for, the arts is an achievement that is without a standardized measurement tool, yet no less important to the overall education of the student.

Despite the evidence supporting the importance of music in schools, support for public school music education remains tenuous. While most studies find good justifications for including music in a student's day, the resources necessary to provide this are not always available. The Music for All Foundation (2004) and the Council for Basic Education (2004) found troubling signs for music education; declining student involvement and decreases in arts instructional time were both evident due to budget issues and priority placed on "tested" subjects. Even when music is offered, constraints placed on public school educators may inhibit their ability to provide students with a quality music education.

### **Purpose and Problem**

As previously stated, teachers today are faced with the choice between “have to understand this,” versus “have to get through this.” There is no shortage of research suggesting the importance of music education in public schools, however it is necessary to understand not why music should be taught in schools, but how the constraints of the current economic and educational landscape affect the implementation of music programs. This study investigates the what, not the why. As Creswell (2002) notes, qualitative study can result in different connections, themes and relationships emerging, but it begins with a “single idea, focus, or concept” of the researcher (p. 147). As an observer of a singular phenomenon, information can lead to many different understandings of real world situations.

Budget cuts, staffing shortages, space limitations, instrumentation issues, lack of student participation or parent support, and high-stakes standardized testing are only a few of the everyday obstacles facing public school music educators. The benefits of music education are well-known, but the current landscape in which instruction is expected to be delivered is overwhelming.

The purpose of this comparative case study research is to describe, explore, and investigate the methods and practices of high school instrumental music education as demonstrated by a Rhode Island Public School and a Rhode Island Community Music School, in order to further understand the nature of public school music education. The study will use a program evaluation based on the National Standards of Music Education.



For the purpose of this study, the National Standards of Music Education are simply a guideline for the organization of observations, thoughts, and emerging themes. The National Standards are universally recognized in the music education community. This is partially evidenced through its presence on, and the amount of resources provided by, the National Association for Music Education website ([nafme.org](http://nafme.org)). Fonder and Eckrick (1999) found that various large universities and colleges throughout the country modified their teacher preparation courses to better reflect the National Standards after their introduction. Similar research into the preparation of music educators showed that college music professors believed they were adequately providing preparation to teach the standards to their students (Adderley, 2000). This study however, focused on K-4 education, and did unveil a lack of confidence in preparing students for all of the standards equally, most significantly the improvisation standard. Studies have uncovered similar shortfalls in the improvisation standard as self-perceived by pre-service and in-service educators (Byo, 1999; Bell, 2003; Orman, 2002; Louk, 2003; Filey, 2009). Many educators foresaw confusion and hesitation at implementing all of the standards and wrote helpful guides (Wells, 1997; Snyder, 2001; Fallis, 1999; Lehman, 1995). This research is not about the National Standards, nor does it anticipate significant observations based on them. Any findings on the National Standards are the result of unexpected themes that emerged throughout the performed observations.

The following research questions will guide this inquiry:

1. What does secondary music education in a Rhode Island Public School look like, as

- described through the National Standards of Music Education?
2. What does secondary music education in a Rhode Island Community Music School look like, as described through the National Standards of Music Education?
  3. What are the similarities and differences between the two settings approaches towards music education, as described through the National Standards of Music Education?
  4. Do the two school settings experience non-musical factors? If so, how are they similar and different?
  5. How do the observed non-musical factors affect the music education of the students in each setting, as described through the National Standards of Music Education?

### **Significance of the Study**

While it is factual to say that public school is the most far-reaching way to provide students with an education in music, it has yet to be established as the best and most comprehensive approach. Music education is not limited to a public school's four walls, community music schools, private lesson programs, and local music stores each educate school age students in music. For this reason, it is necessary to explore the educational practices of independent music organizations, specifically community music schools. In order to better understand the music education public school music students are receiving, this study will compare and contrast this with a setting where music is the sole focus. While a student comes to school for many reasons and has a long day, full of

responsibilities, students attend community music schools with the singular purpose of studying music.

This study was originally designed as an exploration of whether community music schools could be a potential replacement for public school education. In 2008-2009, the country was in the middle of the economic recession and public school programs were being threatened. As Rhode Island public school programs faced reductions and cuts, I was interested in exploring options outside of public school. The community music school may, in a worst-case scenario, be the only access to music education students have in a community. As the economy recovered and I learned more about the community music school cost/accessibility, the study morphed into a focus of public school education with the community music school providing an ideal situation. The community music school is a significantly different setting than a public school music program, however it is still focused on the musical education of students through performance. The community music school provides a glimpse into what a public school music program could be without the outside factors and issues facing public school music education. The community music school may also provide ideas and insights that public school educators may not think of because of their setting.

For music educators in any setting, it is important to understand and reflect on our practices. By studying the work of both public school music educators and community school music educators, a foundation can arise for the important discussion of how the

constraints of public school may deter from the overall education students receive in music.

### **Exploration of the Researchers' Bias**

As John Creswell (2002) notes, there is a need for the researcher “to recognize that their views and perspectives, rooted in personal cultural and historical factors, ultimately shape their interpretations.” (p. 259). For that reason, my own personal experiences with the research topic will be explored briefly.

After six years of teaching public school music, I would be lying if I said that I was thrilled with the current state of public school education. Veteran teachers do not hesitate to let me and other young teachers know that this is the worst they've ever seen it, referring to both the financial and social climate of education.

In my short time teaching, I have personally experienced many of the pitfalls of public education. After my first year teaching as a part-time elementary school band director, my position was combined with the middle school band position due to budget cuts. In my next district as a middle school band director, I witnessed the cutting of both the elementary band and orchestra programs completely. Two full-time positions and the successful feeder program into the middle school were lost. In 2009, every teacher with less than three years in the district, myself included, was pink-slipped due to a shortfall in the town budget. For two years, I was without a classroom for my band program, forced to use the school auditorium. In that time five instruments were stolen due to a lack of security. The space was also used often during the school day for assemblies,

performances, and other events that required the band to be cancelled. In my third year as the band director, the schedule was changed which resulted in no time during the day for full band rehearsal. Rehearsals for full band were moved to after school, interfering with many activities, clubs, sports, and extra help. My program has since found a classroom, due to cuts in exploratory programs, and a new administration has introduced a schedule that allows for ensemble time.

While I remain steadfast and work hard to have a program of which I can be proud, I wish many things were different. Music education is, in my opinion, a necessary part of a students' school day; yet I found myself thinking about ways to educate students in settings that did not carry the limitations, present in public schools.

Growing up outside of New York City, I was privileged to be a member of private and community music organizations that allowed me to have some of the most memorable experiences of my musical career. I greatly enjoyed my public school music education and credit them for inspiring me to become a music educator, but I became a musician in the outside organizations. When I walked into school I had tests to take, presentations to give and gossip to share. Making music, even for a band-obsessed kid like me, was only a part of my day. When I walked into the Nassau-Suffolk Wind Ensemble rehearsal, for three hours every Saturday, my sole intention was to make music.

I have a clear interest and affection for both public school music education and community music education. I entered this study with an open mind and only hoped to observe great music education in two different settings.

In order to fully be able to explore this topic objectively, I used the phenomenological practice of “bracketing,” in which I placed all of my personal experiences, beliefs, and biases into a bracket. This bracket was placed aside while I conducted my research. This allowed me to focus “on the topic and question” and not be affected by personal beliefs. (Moustakas, pg. 97)

### **Definitions**

#### *Public School Music Education*

- Music instruction that takes place in a school funded from tax revenue .
- Represented in this study by a public school in Rhode Island

#### *Community Music Schools*

- An independent organization that provides music education to students of all ages based on private funds.
- Represented in this study by a Rhode Island community music school.

#### *The National Standards of Music Education*

#### The Standards

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music. (singing)
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

- (performing)
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments. (improvising)
  4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines. (composing)
  5. Reading and notating music. (reading)
  6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music. (listening)
  7. Evaluating music and music performances. (evaluating)
  8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts. (relationships)
  9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture. (history)

### **Limitations**

1. Due to the scope of this research, certain forms of music education were not included:
  - a. The Independent Music Teacher - teachers who are not affiliated with a school, but provide private and group instruction to secondary instrumental students.
  - b. Private School Music Education - general education schools that are not publicly funded.
2. Observations were limited to secondary instrumental music education.
3. Due to restrictions on time and resources, only two schools in Rhode Island were observed.

4. The National Standards of Music Education were used for consistency in evaluation only. They were not used to judge the success of a program, nor were they seen as a requirement that needed to be met. It is important to note that the observed educators met standards through their efforts to prepare students for performance. The standards were not their guide, but a result of their instruction.



## CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### A. The National Standards; History and Research

#### The National Standards: History

##### *Purpose*

The National Standards of Music Education are the direct result of “The Goals 2000: Educate America Act.” In 1994, the United States Congress passed monumental legislation that set out to “improve learning and teaching by providing a national framework for education reform” ([www2.ed.gov](http://www2.ed.gov)). This framework built upon the National Council on Education Standards and Testing’s 1992 push for the “development and adoption” of a national system of standards to be used voluntarily by educators. A stated goal of the act was for students to demonstrate competency in many subject areas, including the arts, which made it the first national legislation to recognize the arts as an academic subject (<http://musiced.nafme.org>).

##### *Creation*

With the recognition of the arts as a fundamental subject, combined with the importance placed on writing national standards, the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations worked to develop standards for grades K-12 in each of the four arts disciplines (theatre, music, art, dance) from 1992-1994. The project was funded with help from the U.S. Department of Education, The National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The standards were created through a large and diverse task force including educators and artists representing the four major arts associations; the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, The National Association of Music Education, National Art Education Association, and the National Dance Association. A first draft of the standards was distributed to assessment groups, consultants and members of the arts community. The process was repeated until all parties were satisfied with the suggested standards. In January 1994 the standards were approved by the National Committee and were formally presented to the U.S. Secretary of Education in March of the same year.

#### *Implementation and Reaction*

In 1994, the National Association of Music Education, through grants from Catherine T. and John D. MacArthur Foundation and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, created a collection of papers designed to help educators implement the standards called *Perspectives on Implementation*. The book is divided into two sections, each exploring different aspects of introducing and incorporating the standards into public school classrooms. The first section, “Implementation: Issues, Barriers, Solutions” focuses on the standards through the viewpoint of the educator. Featured essays explore the steps needed to successfully bring the standards into the classroom. Issues addressed include advocacy, the development of professional resources, connecting with general curriculum teachers, and ways to assess the implementation of the standards.

The second section, “Implementation: Strategies for Constituencies” explores the relationship between the standards and the larger school and town community. The

constituencies targeted in this section include parents, administrators, school boards, the local business community, and state legislators.

While this document does not provide information directly related to this study's focus, it does provide insight into the mindset of the education community during the introduction and implementation of the National Standards. It is interesting to step back into a time when music education was first being brought into the forefront of public education. Since the current study explores the current constraints placed on public school music education almost 20 years later, *Perspectives on Implementation* is a helpful tool in understanding the evolution of public school music education. The author offers a particularly prescient warning in the document's summary: while they acknowledge the excitement that "for the first time in the history of education in the United States, the arts have a place at the core of academic study," and that there is "broad agreement on what young people ought to know and be able to in the arts," they also acknowledge the reality that "a short public attention span and relentless competition for shrinking education dollars" may mean that progress will not be maintained without a fight.

#### *Current State*

In 2011, the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards was formed as a partnership between the major arts education associations to revise the National Standards. Seeing the need to reassess the decades-old original standards, the NCCAS seeks to create standards that better fit into the current model of public school education. Recognizing an "emphasis on core standards as drivers for our education system," the

coalition aims to create standards that will meet the twenty-first century demands of the classroom. The coalition fears that without revisions to the current standards, the arts “risk being marginalized” and that access to programs will be limited.

The first revision of the standards is due in the summer of 2013, with the final revision expected sometime in 2014. The process is open to the public and educators are encouraged to follow the process and provide feedback along the way.

(<http://nccas.wikispaces.com/>)

#### The National Standards: Related Research

Fonder and Eckrich (1999) investigated whether the development of the National Standards of Music Education impacted colleges and universities music teacher education curricula. A mail questionnaire was sent to the music education department chair at every National Association of Schools of Music member (NASM). The questionnaire asked for demographic information about the college and “What substantial changes in individual undergraduate music curricula have been made at your institution as a direct result of the voluntary national standards?” Substantial changes were defined as changes to final examinations, projects, or demonstrations. If substantial changes were made, the respondent was asked to answer additional questions regarding whether the changes were reflected in their coursework in theory, history, education, ensemble, liberal arts, or another sequence. The final question asked if the standards altered an exit examination or competency demonstration needed for graduation. Forty-eight percent of the surveys were returned (two-hundred and sixty-seven schools).

A majority of respondents, seventy-seven percent, changed their music education coursework in order to better address the national standards. These changes included lesson plan redesign, evaluation restructuring, and adding required reading. Fifty percent of the schools that changed their theory courses, twenty-nine percent of respondents, added an improvisation unit. Changes in the history sequence include the addition of world music and jazz music units. There were no significant patterns in the additional answers.

Overall, the data did not show an overwhelming trend that the national standards played a major role in the determining of curricula, with the exception of music education classes. The authors do feel that “there can be no question that the respondents to this survey believe the national standards have become a force in the evolution of the preparation of a music teacher.”

This research supports the use of the national standards as a tool for the present research. A majority of large music institutions changed their music education course requirements to reflect the national standards. This is evidence that the national standards are an accepted part of the music education vernacular.

Many scholars anticipated educators struggling with the implementation of the standards. Wells (1997) set out to provide a guide to help teachers design their curriculum with the standards in mind, while also generating “significant discussions,” between music educators. Wells calls the standards a “valuable resource to guide

curriculum development,” but acknowledges that there is no clear process for turning them into a structured program.

Wells found that communication in his own district has already improved due to communication over the standards and has focused the districts efforts of curriculum development. It has provided a “common set of goals, concepts, and vocabulary.” Wells and his team used organized the standards into three main processes; creating, performing, and responding. The goal was that every standard would touch upon each of these processes. Instead of addressing performance simply from a playing standpoint, students were expected to read, listen, analyze, describe, and understand the music in relation to outside subjects. Wells found that this structure more accurately resembled a music classroom.

Wells then split the standards into two parts; assessment dimensions and task constructions. Each standard should be assessed by providing the student specific assessment requirements and determining exactly how they will show that understanding. Wells and his team listed all of the assessment dimensions and task constructions as they directly relate to each standard. They found that this provided a helpful guide for determining what students should be asked to do in the classroom and how they should be assessed. The process also helped them develop their grade-by-grade sequence.

Wells found that designing a standards-based curriculum has created a more focused and meaningful working environment in his district. The curriculum is clear and focuses the work the students and teachers are doing.

This research demonstrates the commitment to the standards in the music classroom. This is just a brief overview of one district's approach, but it shows the desire to create a standards-based curriculum. Creating such a curriculum is a complicated task and requires significant effort, but Wells and his team found that the effort paid off with a more task driven education.

### **B. The Current State of Public School Music Education and Non-Musical Factors**

Literature reviewed for this study focused on the current state of public school arts education within the last ten years. The research is considered for its potential insight into the constraints placed on music educators.

In the current economic and educational landscape, decisions to maintain or cut a district's music program are often forced upon administrators and school committees across the country. With increased importance placed on standardized testing in core subjects, administrators must decide the best use of their district's money, space, personnel, and time. Major (2013) performed interviews and collected data to understand how a suburban school district outside of Detroit, Michigan handled the decision to either support or cut their music education program.

The Lekbery School District had gone through ten years without cutting any of their music programs. Major, a former employee of the school system, wanted to understand the following: What influenced Lekbery School District decision makers to

keep music in the curriculum? What criteria did Lekbery's school board members and administrators use in deciding the value of music education? What obstacles did Lekbery School District overcome to keep its music program? Current music educators, a retired music educator, building administration, past and present upper administration, and parents were interviewed. Two parents were also school board members. Three major themes emerged from the research. The first was that the district's educational philosophy defined music as an important part of the students' experience.

Administrators actively sought to provide students with a "quality education, with a broad range of programs." All interviewees felt music was part of "developing each child's full potential." Educators in the district felt administration placed value on the programs through financial support. Administration believed that funding, scheduling, attending events, and actively sustaining the programs were how they placed value on the programs.

In seeking to understand the individual roles each group took on to create this philosophy of music in Lekbery, Major found that the overwhelming support of music comes from a strong synergy between all parties. While music teachers maintain high quality programs, administrators act as public relations with colleagues and the community. Parents encouraged their students to participate and attended concerts and events. Lastly, school board members would not consider cutting any of Lekbery's music programs, even in times of economic struggle. One group would not be as powerful without the support of the others.



The second theme found in the research was the many considerations that go into making major decisions for a school district. Political, fiscal, and educational considerations all played an equal part in determining the Lekbery school district's program offerings. The Lekbery school district worked hard to maintain a positive public image that would keep families and community members pleased. All interviewees agreed that the music department contributed positively to the district's image. The number of students enrolled in music helped determine whether the programs were fiscally smart for the district. Many administrators and teachers agreed that a music program with over 100 students involved was a good use of district money. The district's "spiral method" of teaching music involved specific programming from the kindergarten to the twelfth grade. For this reason, no part of the music program was cut due to the importance of each step in the teaching process.

The third theme to emerge from the research was the need for administrators to make tough decisions. Upper administrators all mentioned that their main priority was "to protect programs from reductions and eliminations." This priority is not always easily met when financial constraints are placed on the district. One thing that sets the Lekbery school district apart was that instead of cutting programs when budgets became tight, they looked into alternative solutions. For example, by bringing students into the district through advertising and creative approaches, the district increased its per-pupil state funding.

In conclusion, Major found that the decision to support a music program in times of financial strain relied on administrators' consideration of "(a) their personal values and philosophies of music education, (b) the values and demands of the community, (c) the quality of teaching that Lekbery could afford and provide, (d) the aesthetic and utilitarian purposes of keeping music education in the curriculum, (e) the economic value that music added, and (f) how the program contributed to the overall image of the school district." This research shows the complexity of modern public school education. A district like Lekbery, where music is a priority and the advice given to an incoming school board member is "change anything you want in the curriculum, but don't mess around with the music program," it still "takes a village" to keep a music program thriving. Creative ways to bring money into the district are necessary, along with the support of all members of the school community.

Major's research is an important reference point for the current study because it illuminates the current and complex state of public school education. This is the setting that the current research takes place in. Highlighting the many difficult and involved decisions that go into supporting a music program sheds light on the many reasons why music education in a public school setting is vulnerable to changing financial and educational landscapes. Even with an outpouring of support for their programs, music teachers in the Lekbery school district still "feared reductions." If reductions were a realistic fear of teachers in a district that prioritizes music education, it can be imagined what teachers in struggling districts throughout the country go through.

Abril and Gault (2008) profiled secondary school music programs through the opinion of principals. Of particular relevance to the current study, one of the research questions explored the principals' perception about the degree to which certain variables impact music education.

One thousand principals picked at random were surveyed to measure the "overall effect of ten variables on their music program." With a fifty-four percent return rate, principals representing all four major geographic areas in the United States rated the variables on a five-point scale. Principals chose a five if they felt the variable had a strongly positive influence on their programs, four for positive, three for no effect, two for negative, and one for strongly negative. Results indicated that No Child Left Behind (NCLB), with thirty-eight percent, and standardized testing, with twenty-six percent, had the highest negative impact responses. It is important to note, however, that a majority of the administrators (forty-nine percent for NCLB and fifty-seven percent for testing) did not feel the programs had any effect on their music programs. Positive influences indicated by principals included students, parents, music teachers, other teachers, and the school board. While the author interprets these data in a positive light, it would seem to be more of a grey area. Two variables that rendered divided responses were budget/finances and scheduling. Eighty-five percent of the respondents answered that budget/finances had a strong influence on their programs, with forty-six percent positive and thirty-nine percent negative. Eighty percent of the principals felt similarly about scheduling with forty-six percent positive and thirty-four percent negative.

Overall analysis shows that four variables (budgeting, scheduling, NCLB, and standardized tests) negatively impacted music programs in twenty-five percent of the schools according to the principals. These results were not limited to a type of school location (rural, urban, suburban) or associated with the socioeconomic status of a community.

The survey also included an open response question asking what they felt was the “primary obstacle inhibiting their ability to fully support,” their school’s music programs. The most common response was financial/budgetary (thirty-two and a half percent) followed by scheduling/time (nineteen point nine percent) outside pressures (fifteen point four percent) staffing (ten point nine percent) unique characteristics of the school (seven point one percent) and facilities/equipment (five point one percent). A very small percentage of responders, nine point two answered that there were no obstacles.

Abril & Gault (2006) conducted a similar study a few years prior, focusing on elementary school principal’s “perceptions of the elementary school music curriculum.” Through a mailed survey, the authors sought to gather information on the following questions: What are principals’ perceptions of music learning outcomes and broad educational goals that result from school music instruction at their respective schools? How do they believe these should exist in ideal conditions? Is there a difference between principals’ ratings for current and ideal conditions? To what degree do certain variables affect the music program?

Principals from around the country responded that “listening to music attentively” was the main perceived music learning outcome in their schools. Having students “create and compose music” was ranked the lowest amongst the responses. These rankings were consistent with the principals’ ideal conditions. The performance of music was second highest for current conditions, and fourth for ideal conditions, while “understanding music in relation to other subjects” was second for ideal situations, but fifth in current classroom conditions. It is easy to understand why a principal would place increased importance on how music relates to the rest of the curriculum, as opposed to being a performance vehicle, in isolation from other subjects.

Data was analyzed to uncover perceptions of education in ideal conditions compared to the reality of their current programs. The highest-ranking goal in both current and ideal music programs was to develop creativity in students. Principals did not think their current programs were “fostering critical thinking,” nor did they want their ideal programs to simply be “providing students with a pleasant diversion during the school day.”

When asked what variables affect their music programs, principals responded that budget/finances (fifty-five point two percent), No Child Left Behind (forty-five point one percent), scheduling (forty point one percent), and standardized tests (thirty-four point four percent), had the strongest negative effects on their programs. Positive influences on their programs included students (ninety-two percent), parents (ninety point one), and the music teacher (eighty-seven point eight percent). Principals were given the opportunity

to expand on the topic of their biggest obstacles when supporting the arts. Results are consistent with research pertaining to secondary schools, with principals listing financial/budgetary (thirty-one point six), scheduling/time (twenty-two point five percent), staffing (thirteen point four percent), outside pressures (twelve point ninety-nine percent) and facilities/equipment (seven point seven, nine percent). Eleven percent of the principals cited no major obstacle. Principals felt the best ways to address problems in their schools music programs involved increased funding (thirty-five point seventy one percent), and legislative testing mandates, and attitudes towards the arts (twenty-five percent).

Abril and Gault's research provides insight into the many non-musical factors that can determine the success of a public school music program. Ninety percent of the principals agree that there is at least one major obstacle between them and fully supporting a school music program. Principals were not asked to discuss their personal educational philosophy and thoughts on music programs, but to objectively survey the current landscape of their school environment. Increased pressure from the federal government after No Child Left Behind has not only placed priority on standardized testing, but has lead districts to focus their time and money on core subjects.

Additional research has explored the non-musical obstacles to music education through the educator's perspective. Scheib (2003) set out to understand the main stressors in the professional lives of public school music educators. Scheib focused on the music department at Lakeview Glen High School, a Midwestern high school. The research site

was chosen due to its open access, broad range of programs offered, and its well-established department. Data was collected through formal and informal observations and interviews of four of the districts' music educators. Observations and interviews were used to provide insight into six author-defined role stressors: role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, underutilization of skills, resource inadequacy, and nonparticipation.

The four teachers, directors of the choir, orchestra, high school band, and middle school band, were first profiled in order to provide background and personal information on each. Lisa Nevoga, the choir director, is "overworked and understaffed," but attributes this solely to the success of her program. She worked hard to build and maintain a culture of "excellence," but has in turn created a program that is beyond the scope of a single educator. Don Turner, the thirty-year veteran band director, feels as though his idealistic commitment to the program as a young man caused him to feel "burned out." Although he openly says he "doesn't care anymore," he spends nine hours a day at school working in both band director and administrative roles. One of his biggest challenges is that in order to rehearse the entire marching band together, he needs to remove students from core classes. He fears this "puts a strain on relations" with his coworkers. Pete Dunn co-teaches the high school band with Don and directs the middle school band program. Pete considers his most consuming role to be "putting out fires." Whether he is fighting scheduling changes with administration or meeting the concerned parents and students, Pete finds that his planning and teaching time take a back seat to being an advocate for his program. The last subject is Chris Davis, the orchestra director.

Chris, while exhibiting “the least amount of tension and stress” of the subjects, still feels as though he is unable to connect with students and colleagues due to the scope of his job. He has petitioned the administration to add orchestral staff in order to shift his focus to maintaining the program he has worked over the last eight years to build.

The author found that none of the subjects felt any significant stress from role ambiguity. Lisa indicated that might be something a “young teacher” may feel. Teachers also demonstrated low stress related to student nonparticipation. However, all four teachers significantly felt the stress of role conflict. These conflicts were both personal (mother vs. choir director) and professional (administrator vs. educator). All teachers felt that their programs took them away from the families in some way. Lisa described conflicts when having to take on administrative roles for her choirs. When she is focusing on fund-raising, organizing, and big picture planning, it takes her out of the classroom. Pete, Don and Lisa all identified stress between being the director of a musical ensemble and being an educator. While they feel stress to create a “high caliber” product for public consumption (concerts, parades, competitions), they are also educators seeking to nurture well-balanced students. They felt conflict between the stress of performance versus the best interest of each individual student being met. Don felt that instead of “just producing a high-performance band program...his role as an educator is, in part, to make sure his students are able to have many different experiences without being overcommitted to just one area.” Chris’s main stress comes from the conflict between recruiter and director. Chris finds it difficult to maintain a high level of performance, while actively seeking out new members to help build the program.



The author defines role overload as no role can be fulfilled satisfactorily due to being “spread too thin.” This was another significant stressor in most of the subjects’ professional lives. Lisa’s role overload comes more from the personal side of being a mother to three young children and her “insatiable drive” to create excellent musical experiences for her choirs. Pete’s stress comes from constantly being the protective voice of the music programs. He is always seeking out information on policy or administrative changes. Chris feels role overload from his second career as a professional musician. While Don did not overly exhibit stress from role overload, he did feel an underutilization of skills.

Underutilization of skills refers to the subject’s time being spent doing tasks that are not associated with being in the classroom. Fund-raising, preparation of rehearsal/performance spaces, and scheduling are a few of the listed tasks. The teachers felt that by needing to fulfill these tasks, they were sacrificing time preparing the best educational experiences for their students. Chris showed the least amount of stress, most likely due to his lack of extra-curricular demands.

Stress due to resource inadequacy focused mainly on the need for additional staffing. The teachers accepted that space, equipment, and supplies would always be scarce teaching in a public school, but they felt significant stress from “their need to maintain and build student enrollment in their programs, schedule rehearsals and performances that take place outside of the school day, and juggle the expectations of their program with what their students can offer in time, abilities, talents, and

commitment.” While Lisa and Chris felt that their programs needed additional teaching staff, Pete and Don were more concerned with the lack of an advocate for their program in the district.

This study highlights the current mindset of public school music educators in a singular location. While they wish to spend their time and efforts focused on creating the best educational and musical environments for their students, they are often faced with outside non-musical stressors. Having to be their own advocate and constantly being on the lookout for potential hazards to their program are two reasons why these public school music educators don't always get to be just music educators. While their programs are respected within the school community, each teacher still felt the need to recruit, build, and prove their worth. Though the goal of case study research is not direct generalization to a wider population, these findings shed light on a common experience among music educators today. Although the sample was very small and targeted, the feelings experienced by veteran teachers in a well-supported system can be an indication as to how teachers around the country may feel.

Miksza, Roeder and Biggs (2010) surveyed educators in order to find out the professional and personal skills they felt were necessary to succeed in public school education. This study also served as a test of methodology with analysis of e-survey versus paper survey participation and data collection. This survey also highlights the non-musical factors that can affect music educators and music education.

The survey consisted of three main areas, teaching skills, personal characteristics, and music skills. Participants ranked ten groups of statements in order of importance in each area. Teachers were also asked to rank the three main areas by importance. The study authors also provided survey takers an opportunity to give advice to first year teachers, as well as list their most common struggles and rewards. Over two hundred teachers from across the country responded, representing first year teachers through veterans.

The skills ranked highest in the music area were “maintain high musical standards,” “display a high level of musicianship,” and “be knowledgeable of subject matter materials.” Skills ranked lowest were the possession of “excellent singing skills” and “proficient piano skills.” Teacher skills ranked highest were “be able to motivate students” and “maintain excellent classroom management procedures.” “Be able to present a lesson with clarity,” “be able to work with students of different ages and abilities,” and “frequently make eye contact with students” were the lowest ranked teacher skills. The personal skill ranked most important was “enthusiastic, energetic,” while “manage stress well” was the lowest. Teachers ranked personal and teaching skills equally high, while music skills were considerably lower.

The most common advice provided for first year teachers fell into the categories of patience and perseverance (eighteen percent), use of mentors (seventeen percent), being organized (sixteen percent), and forming and maintaining relationships (fifteen percent). Struggles most commonly identified included motivating students and

classroom management (twelve percent), negotiating school schedules (twelve percent), budgetary issues (eleven percent), and dealing with administrators and other classroom teachers (ten percent). The biggest reward overwhelming feeling of student success, voiced by nearly half of the responders (forty-eight percent).

The results of this survey provide some starting points into a discussion of current public school music education. It is interesting that teachers felt their teaching skills and personal characteristics were more important than their musical abilities. This may show that while they are music educators, it is much more necessary for them to be prepared to work in any kind of environment and with any kind of student, regardless of musical goals. Having to be enthusiastic and energetic first means having to create a music classroom that students want to be in. This is directly related to recruitment and attrition of programs. As observed in Major's research, the size of a program can be used to dictate its importance. Having an enthusiastic and energetic leader is one of the best ways to keep numbers strong and students wanting to join. While it is important to be personable, the teacher should also maintain high standards of musical excellence in their classroom. The results of the survey also show that scheduling, budgetary concerns, and dealing with school administration are universal concerns among educators. Although this study may not specifically identify the struggles being dealt with in the modern music classroom, it does show the skills teachers believe are necessary to survive in the current educational landscape.

### *Summary*

The above research offers a slight window into the world of public school music educators and the possible constraints that they are facing. By examining the process of determining the value of a program, it is easy to understand the financial, educational, political, and personal strains placed on administration in times of financial struggle. Insight into principals' opinions of the delivery and purpose of music education provides better clarity of the current educational demands placed on music educators. Teachers' self-perceptions is yet another side of the same issue. The most significant finding from this review of literature is the glaring need for more. A lack of research on music education as a part of public education is necessary to continue to define and improve the role of the music educator. A significant lack of research also appears when researching community music education, specifically instrumental ensemble instruction. Research discussing the community music educator focuses on African tribes, European towns, and a different kind of music educator than what is appearing throughout communities in the United States.

Related research was limited when the search focused solely on constraints in the public school classroom and the instrumental ensemble community music educator. There is a need to further understand what exactly is happening in and out of public school music classrooms across the country due to a changing economy and constantly evolving educational legislation.

## CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

### Evolution of the Study

The 2007 economic recession sent financial strains through the public school system. On top of the growing pressures imposed by the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, schools were faced with tough fiscal decisions. As a public school music educator, I was feeling these repercussions first-hand. Schools across the area were reducing educational time, and cutting positions, if not whole programs. I was interested in further understanding outside methods of providing secondary instrumentalists with music education.

I have experienced the reasons why public school music education is necessary, while also dealing with the immense amount of obstacles that public school education presents.

I originally chose my thesis topic because it seemed that times were getting worse and community music education might eventually become the only avenue for public school students to discover a love and talent for music. Since 2009, the economy has recovered somewhat; most programs have survived, while not necessarily intact. While the panic that precipitated my research may have subsided, I have since become more acutely aware of the surrounding high-stake test driven, and financially burdened landscape in which public school music educators are expected to teach.

The initial focus of the research was a comparison between the practices used in a Rhode Island public school and community music school, through the lens of the National Standards of Music. After hours of observations, informal discussions, and a survey of the students of the community music school, the focus of the study shifted. It became apparent that the methods and practices of the different settings were not as important as the environment in which they expected to be carried out. The study became an observation of what music education is when dealt with the realities of a modern public school model run by test scores and budgetary demands.

### **Design**

With the intent of fully investigating how the constraints of the current economic and educational landscape affect the implementation of public school music programs, a comparative case study provided the most appropriate format for information gathering. As Creswell (2002) defines it, a case study is an “in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection” (p. 485). For the purposes of this study, the bounded system refers to the public school music classroom and the ensemble rehearsals at the Rhode Island community music school. Extensive data was collected through informal and formal observations, informal interviews, and student surveys in both the public school music classroom and a community music school classroom.

The comparative case study method allowed for a collection of data that did not interfere with the normal routine of the classrooms. The research questions that focused on classroom instruction (Questions 1, 2, and 3) could only be answered through

observations. The research questions that addressed possible non-musical circumstances (Questions 4 and 5) were best answered through observations and interviews.

Colwell (2002) noted that while a case study provides a “greater depth (of data) obtained,” there is the sacrifice of breadth. (p. 116) The current study is intended to provide understanding of the current state of public school music education through the lens of two programs. Colwell states that one of the positive aspects of the case study approach is its ability to generate theories and hypotheses for future research (p. 116).

The purpose of case study research is to gain a better understanding of a “bounded system,” which Creswell (2002) defines as being determined by “time, place, or some physical boundaries” (p. 485). In this comparative case study, the “bounded system” is public school music education and while the case study approach is not designed to provide a generalization of a wider issue, it allows for the beginning of a dialogue regarding current music education practices. Data is collected through a variety of formal and informal resources including observations, interviews, and surveys.

## **Data Sources**

### **Observation Sites**

#### **Public School**

Money Magazine named this Rhode Island city one of the “100 Best Places to Live” in 2006 (<http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag>). According to the United



States Census conducted in 2010, this city is a city of approximately 80,000 people, ranking as the third largest city in Rhode Island. The median household income is \$57,922, median family income is \$70,932 and the average home value is \$258,900. While these most recent numbers are four years old, they are still relevant when providing background on the city. While it can appear on the outside as a strong, middle-class community, it is noticeably divided.

The city is split into two high schools, East and West, notable for the disparity of their student populations. A significant point is the difference in students living below the poverty line. West is slight below the national average with twelve point four percent, while East is significantly higher with forty-seven point two percent of their students living below the poverty line ([greatschools.net](http://greatschools.net)). I was directed to the public school's band program by professors and coworkers who regarded it as a location to observe public school music education at a high level, despite its economic challenges.

While at the public school I observed the Wind Ensemble, Concert Band and Jazz Band. All ensembles were under the direction of Mr. M with co-direction of Mr. G. Mr. M has been involved with the public school for over 20 years. As Co-Director of the Instrumental and Choral music programs, Mr. M has led the band to national marching band championships, as well as conducting the choirs, wind ensemble, concert band, and jazz ensemble.

Band class met every day and consisted of students from grades 9-12. All seventy students in the class were in the Concert Band. During the same class time, the Wind Ensemble would rehearse. The fifteen or so students that were not in the Wind

Ensemble would remain in their seats and sit quietly through the rehearsal. The two groups both practiced standard concert band repertoire in preparation for their concert. Jazz Band met before the school day twice a week.

### Rhode Island Community Music School

The community music school was chosen due to its positive reputation in the musical community of Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts. After contacting the administration for permission to observe their program, I was invited over for a tour of the facilities. After explaining my research, I was given permission to observe any classes I needed to. With the intentions of observing a small lesson group, a jazz ensemble and a large ensemble, I arranged observation times with a Clarinet Ensemble, the Jazz Big Band and the Senior Wind Ensemble.

The community music school prides itself on its “rich history of music education.” The beginnings of the community school were founded with the first Youth Orchestra program being offered in 1956. In 1986, the school added lessons, chamber music, and jazz/rock/blues programs, finally merging in 2000 with a local orchestra. Today the school works with approximately 1500 students ranging from young children to adults. In addition to their earlier programs, they now offer small ensembles, and large ensembles for school aged instrumentalists, as well as classes in the Suzuki method, early childhood music, and theory and ear training. They also make a great effort to partner with community schools and programs to help provide music education to areas that are in need. A major goal of the school is to help provide music education to every

elementary school child in Rhode Island through outreach and teacher support programs, which they hope to achieve in the next 5 years.

Students who participate in the wind ensembles hail from all over Rhode Island and parts of Massachusetts. A majority of towns represented rank higher than the national averages for median household income and home value (US Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates). However, it is interesting to note that East Providence, RI has a median household income below the national average, but has the second most students in the program. East Providence and Providence are the only two communities that do not meet the national average for median household income. Ten students, or thirteen point eight percent of participants, come from those communities. Figure 1 shows the median household income of the towns that students come from and how many students come from each town.

Table 1

*Median Household Income of Towns Represented at the Community Music School*

Town, State	Median Household Income	# of Students
Barrington, RI	\$94,300	7
Bristol, RI	\$63,000	1
Coventry, RI	\$66,997	2
Cranston, RI	\$57,922	2
Cumberland, RI	\$72,830	8
<b>East Providence, RI</b>	<b>\$50,319</b>	<b>8</b>
Exeter, RI	\$98,439	3

Franklin, MA	\$71,174	1
Johnston, RI	\$55,394	1
Lincoln, RI	\$71, 926	2
Narragansett, RI	\$57,906	2
North Smithfield, RI	\$75,838	9
<b>Providence, RI</b>	<b>\$36,925</b>	<b>2</b>
Scituate, RI	\$74,000	6
Sharon, MA	\$89,256	8
Seekonk, MA	\$56, 364	2
South Kingstown, RI	\$71,192	2
Warren, RI	\$52,011	1
West Greenwich, RI	\$81,419	2
Westport, MA	\$55,436	2
<b>NATIONAL AVERAGE</b>	<b>\$51,914</b>	

Table 1

Students in the Wind Ensembles also represent a wide array of private schools in the area. The most students from any school, public or private, come from Mount Saint Charles. Mount Saint Charles is a Christian junior and senior high school located in Woonsocket, RI. Tuition ranges for all of the private schools represented is listed in Figure 2. The tuitions range from \$6,500 to \$28,600.

Table 2

*Private School Tuition of Students Represented at the Community Music School*

Private School, State	Tuition	# of Students
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Barrington Christian Academy, RI	\$12,500	1
Bishop Feehan, MA	\$8,650	1
Bishop Hendricken, RI	\$11,650	1
Gordon School, RI	\$26,745	1
LaSalle Academy, RI	\$12,950	1
Lincoln School, RI	\$28,105	1
Masters Regional Academy, RI	\$6,500	1
Moses Brown	\$28,385	1
Mount Saint Charles, RI	\$10,900	12
The Prout School, RI	\$11,200	1
Providence Country Day School, RI	\$28,600	1
The Sage School	\$25,670	1
Whitinsville Christian Academy, MA	\$9,125	1

Table 2

At the community music school, I observed the senior wind ensemble and the jazz big band. Both ensembles are auditioned groups, open to all students in the area from grades ten through twelve. The senior wind ensemble is under the direction of Dr. D. Dr. D is an adjunct professor of music at Boston University and professor of music at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell. He is also the director of wind ensemble at both schools. Dr. D is an active performer in the New England area, having performed as a member of the Rhode Island Philharmonic, Boston Classic Orchestra, and as a substitute for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston Pops Orchestra, and the Boston Ballet Orchestra.

The jazz big band is under the direction of Ms. W. Ms. W is an associate professor of contemporary writing and production at Berklee College of Music. She holds Bachelors degrees from Berklee and Brown University and a Masters in flute performance from New England Conservatory of Music.

### **Observations**

Observations were conducted through the lens of the National Standards. The National Standards were chosen due to the guidelines they clearly provide. The specific components of music education provided is a clear and organized framework for observations and field notes. An observation protocol was created corresponding to the standards. In addition to the standards, there was a space to write down “memorable quotes.” This section provided space to note the non-musical characteristics of the classroom and instructors. A copy of the observation form is provided (see Appendix).

### **Student Surveys**

At the third observation of each site, students at the community music school were asked to complete a survey (see Appendix). The survey intended to explore the differences between the students’ school experiences and their time in the community music school. The significance of these surveys for this study was to provide additional data into the state of school music education. These students have direct knowledge of how the community music school compares to their school ensemble. While they were not from the specific studied public school system, there is still insight to be learned from

their experiences and thoughts. The survey questions included; (1) Describe how this ensemble compares to your high school ensemble. (2) In what ways do you prepare differently for this ensemble than you do for your high school ensemble? (3) Describe how your private lessons related to your work in your school ensemble and this ensemble. Are they similar/different? (4) Do you plan on pursuing music after high school? How have your school ensemble and this ensemble affected that decision? (5) How do you feel your life (musically, socially, personally) has changed because of the Rhode Island Youth Wind Ensemble?

### **Data Collection**

#### **Rhode Island Public School Observations**

I conducted four observations of the bands that lasted forty-five minutes each, and four observations of jazz band, which also lasted forty-five minutes. The total time spent observing the music program was six hours. Observations were performed on four different occasions in the month of May 2009 with a concert on May 21.

#### **Rhode Island Community Music School Observations**

I conducted four observations of the senior wind ensemble that lasted two hours each, and four observations of the jazz big band, which last one and a half hours each. The total time spent observing was fourteen hours. I sat in the back of the room facing

the conductor with the students' backs to me. Observations were performed on four different occasions in May 2009, with the end-of-the-year performance at the end of the month.

### **Data Analysis**

The steps of case study data analysis are listed by Creswell (2002) as preparing and organizing the data, exploring the data, describing and developing themes from the data, representing and reporting the findings, interpreting the findings, and validating the accuracy and credibility of the findings (p. 237).

Data was organized through the scope of the National Standards of Music Education and into a section labeled "miscellaneous." Once the data was explored, themes emerged that created an overarching story about each location. The "miscellaneous" section turned into a deep resource for themes that were not predicted. By following the case study model, the research was allowed to follow whatever path the data led it through. The continuous interpretation and review of data allowed for constant assessment and inquiry into the cases.

Robert E. Stake (1995) notes that in case study research "there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p.71).



## CHAPTER IV – DATA ANALYSIS

The data analyzed in this chapter will follow the qualitative approach, as outlined by John Creswell (2002). Creswell (2002) lists the following process for qualitative analysis; prepare and organize data for analysis, explore the data, describe and develop themes from the data, represent and report the findings, interpret the findings, and validate the accuracy and credibility of the findings (pg. 257). This is a different approach than a quantitative analysis. Qualitative and quantitative data analyses have a similar outline of procedure, but vary significantly in assigning value and meaning to the findings. Firstly, quantitative analysis is focused on testing a hypothesis (pg. 235). Preparing and organizing the data involves scoring, which assigns numeric values to findings. Quantitative researchers must determine a statistical program to use and organize their data in tables and figures. While quantitative research is focused on testing a hypothesis through numeric and measurable data, qualitative analysis lets the data determine the significant meaning behind the research.

All of the ensembles that I observed were working towards their final performances of the year. While this analysis is an objective look at both programs, due to the nature of the case study model, some author subjectivity went into deciding what information was worth noting. All information gathered is through the interpretation of the author, although there was a conscious effort made to observe from an objective standpoint.

Creswell (2002), noted that the “distinction between description and analysis is not always clear” (pg. 492). In qualitative case study data analysis, the information gathered is analyzed in order to further understand the research questions. A result of this kind of analysis however, is the emerging of unexpected themes and patterns that may have equal or sometimes more significance on the original research purpose. Once information is analyzed, the researcher then interprets it, through their scope of understanding. Interpretation is “the most subjective” phase of analysis (pg. 493). Unforeseen “problems that arose during the fieldwork” will also be explored in case study analysis.

### **Collected Data**

#### Observations

The Rhode Island public school and the Rhode Island community music school were determined as the two sites for observation. At each site, a secondary instrumental concert ensemble and a secondary instrumental jazz ensemble were chosen to be observed. Each ensemble was observed for four consecutive rehearsals during the end of their academic year. There was a significant difference in minutes observed between the two sites because the public school ensembles rehearsed for forty-five minutes and the community music school senior wind ensemble jazz big band rehearsing for one-hundred and twenty minutes, and ninety minutes, respectively. In total, the public school concert band and wind ensemble were observed for two hours and fifteen minutes. This is forty-

five minutes less than planned due to rehearsal being cancelled because of testing and assemblies. The public school jazz band was observed for three hours. The community music school wind ensemble was observed for eight hours and the jazz big band was observed for six hours.

Observation forms were filled out for each observation. Four pages of notes were collected during the public school concert band and wind ensemble observations and six pages during the public school jazz band observations. The community music school observations totaled seven pages each. Observations were organized into who was at the rehearsal, where it took place, the standards, and memorable quotes.

### Student Surveys

As an important addition to the field observations, I felt it was most necessary to speak directly to the participants. Due to time and resources, I was only able to receive survey responses from students in the wind ensemble; however the responses were more than sufficient to explore the differences and similarities between the students' experiences at the community music school and their school music programs. Fifty-one student surveys were collected. Of those surveys, thirty students identified themselves as public school students, twelve students attend a private school, and nine students did not list their affiliation. The survey had five questions and students were asked to answer anonymously.

### **Data Coding**

Following the steps outlined by Creswell (2002), data was analyzed from the large to the small. This concept refers to the approach of looking at the larger scale themes and observances and finding smaller themes within them. All of the collected data was read and organized revealing reoccurring concepts, or codes. These codes were then used for a secondary analysis, which helped organize the data more extensively. Eventually some codes were grouped together and from this, themes revealed themselves. Data is organized by the standards defined in the research questions and the themes that emerged.

## **PART I: RESEARCH QUESTION ANALYSIS**

### **Research Questions**

1. What does secondary music education in the Rhode Island Public School look like, as described through the National Standards of Music Education?
2. What does secondary music education in the Rhode Island Community Music School look like, as described through the National Standards of Music Education?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the two settings approaches towards music education, as described through the National Standards of Music Education?

**NATIONAL STANDARD #1:** Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

*Public School*

In the wind ensemble, concert band, and jazz band, the students were sometimes asked to sing their pitches when tuning and to sing various passages from their music. When students approached a difficult passage in their music, Mr. M would have them sing through it slowly. Brass players were also asked to sing pitches in order to better hear partials and intervals. The most significant role that singing played in instruction, however, was the modeling by Mr. M. Many times, especially in jazz band, Mr. M would sing proper pitch, rhythm and articulations with the students listening carefully. Mr. M would also sing missing parts in jazz band in order to help the students hear what was missing.

*Community Music School*

A very similar situation occurred in both community music school rehearsals. Students were often exposed to singing and asked to listen intently, but they very rarely participated themselves. Most times the conductor used singing as a tool to model what the students had to perfect in their playing. In the jazz big band Ms. W would sing the missing parts, scat the rhythms and articulations and be very animated with singing with the students. In the wind ensemble Dr. D used singing regularly to work on intonation, rhythm, and phrasing.

*Discussion*

Both programs used singing in very comparable and effective ways. As conductors modeled parts, articulation, style, and intonation, students were able to perform their music at higher levels. The students, while not singing themselves, understood the importance of singing as a way to understand their parts and the parts around them.

It is important to note that singing was used as a tool to get students to perform better. Students were not asked to work on their singing ability, perform together while singing, or place any importance on their own ability to sing. Singing was a device used, mostly by the director, to create a better understanding of the literature they were performing.

**NATIONAL STANDARD #2:** Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

This standard is divided into two sections: warm-ups and repertoire. Evaluations were not made regarding the ensembles' performance quality. This section provides only observations of factual and objective events.

### I. Warm-Ups

*Public School*

All of the ensembles typically warmed up quickly and efficiently, always starting with the concert B-flat scale in legato quarter notes to the ninth of the scale. Routines changed from there and followed with students either playing a few more scales in the

similar style, or playing a chorale. This structure meant that the students knew exactly what was expected of them and how to settle into rehearsal mode.

### *Community Music School*

The wind ensemble started every rehearsal with tuning and tuning chords. The conductor would allow time for each student to individually tune themselves.

The jazz big band often took a very relaxed approach to warming up. Students were trusted to play a bit on their own and to be able to think on their feet during warm-ups. Improvising and soloing would be incorporated into warming up. One rehearsal the students were asked to incorporate music theory into their warm-up by playing the F Mixolydian scale, D Mixolydian scale, D Phrygian scale and different combinations of those scales with the concert B-flat Major scale.

## II. Repertoire

### *Public School*

The concert band rehearsed two pieces for their Spring Concert: *Flight of the Piasa* by Robert Sheldon and *Dreams and Proclamations* by Roland Barrett. Both pieces are grade four in difficulty.

The wind ensemble prepared two pieces of their own: *The Redwoods* by Rossano Galante and Gustav Holst's *First Suite in E Flat*. Both pieces were also grade four.

The jazz band rehearsed three pieces for their performance. The pieces were *Low Tide* by Elmo Hope, arranged by Don Sickler, *Brazil* by S.K. Russell & Ary Barroso, and an arrangement of Earth, Wind and Fire's *Fantasy*.

#### *Community Music School*

The wind ensemble prepared four pieces for their performance. The students rehearsed John Philip Sousa's *The Rose, Shamrock and Thistle* (grade 3), *Beachscapes* (grade 4), a locally commissioned work by Roger Cichy, a James Curnow setting of *Fiddle Tunes from the American Revolution* (grade 4), and *Abram's Pursuit* (grade 4) by David Holsinger.

An interesting point about *Beachscapes* is that it was commissioned by the American Band in 2008 to pay musical tribute to three beaches in Rhode Island: Nauset, Rocky Neck, and Scarborough. It is also interesting to note that the Mount Saint Charles Academy band performed the piece the same year as the wind ensemble. The groups share twelve students and Mount Saint Charles Academy has the most students from a private or a public school in the group.

The jazz big band worked ten different pieces over the course of my observations. Students were more likely to sight-read through music in this ensemble. The pieces ranged from standard jazz repertoire, such as *Birdland* by Manhattan Transfer, *In the Mood* by Glenn Miller, and *Blue Rondo a La Turk* by Dave Brubeck, to more modern blues, latin and funk influenced pieces like *Milk and Cookies* by Alvin Jett, *Yeah, Right*



by Frank Foster, Joseph Turrin's *Fandango*, *Flashback* by Dave Lalama, *Splanky* by Neal Hefti, and *Amigo* by Larry Clark.

### *Discussion*

Instead of a difference in the quality and difficulty of repertoire, the most significant difference between the two settings was the amount of repertoire rehearsed. The amount of repertoire rehearsed between the two settings. Both programs asked their students to perform difficult repertoire at a high level. However, not all the public school students prepared as many pieces as the community music school students. All students in the community music school wind ensemble rehearsed four pieces total (one grade three and three grade fours), while students in the public school concert band prepared half of that. Members of the public school wind ensemble actually prepared the most challenging repertoire with four different grade four pieces, with two of those pieces being performed with the concert band.

While the concert band performed half the amount of repertoire, they also had half the amount of time to prepare it in, with the wind ensemble rehearsing during their class time. The concert band only had half of a period to work on their repertoire, versus a full period for the wind ensemble students and two-hour rehearsal blocks for the community music school wind ensemble students.

The community music school jazz big band students were the most challenged as far as their warm-ups and the amount of repertoire that they were asked to perform. Functioning both as a performance ensemble and a professional performing group

(meaning they play gigs other than their end of the year concert), the jazz big band prepared nine total pieces in a semester. In contrast, the public school jazz ensemble prepared three pieces for performance.

All of the students were introduced to a wide range of repertoire of equivalent level of difficulty. Students in the community music school programs may have performed more repertoire, but this is not due to differences in the level of talent, challenge, and expectations in the program. Instead, it is more a symptom of the schedule and time challenges facing the public school programs.

**NATIONAL STANDARD #3:** Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.

#### *Public School*

The concert band and wind ensemble students were not asked to improvise in any way. This will be further discussed later in the analysis.

The jazz band improvised as part of their rehearsals. As typical in jazz music, all of the repertoire had solo sections, and various students participated. Throughout the one-hundred and eighty minutes of observations, five students improvised solos. While there were no solos taken during the first observation, the next rehearsals were used to determine who would solo in the concert. During the second rehearsal an alto saxophone student tried soloing on both *Fantasy* and *Low Tide*. *Low Tide* also features a guitar solo. In the next rehearsal, *Low Tide* added a tenor sax player, and the alto player did not play

on *Fantasy*. In the last rehearsal before the concert, and the last rehearsal observed, Mr. M became a lot more specific out of what he wanted out of the soloists, specifically the drum solo in *Brazil*, which they hadn't rehearsed in weeks. When students were uncomfortable with the entrance after the drum solo, Mr. M explained to the students that it was "her prerogative to solo that way" and that it was "pretty clear" to him. Feeling uncomfortable and self-conscious, the drum-set player began to play less in her solo and Mr. M noted that "the solo is getting shorter, don't be apologetic." The set solos for each song were a guitar and tenor in *Low Tide*, tenor sax, piano and drums in *Brazil*, and a tenor sax solo in *Fantasy*. The tenor sax solos were all taken by the same student.

Mr. M was very careful to create a positive environment for the students trying to solo through reinforcement and assurance that it was their solo and they could make it what they want. I only observed the performance of improvisation, not the instruction and discussion.

### *Community Music School*

The wind ensemble students were not asked to improvise in any way. This will be further discussed later in the analysis.

The jazz big band used improvisation in various situations. Dr. W used improvisation to teach students how to not only perform, but also how to feel and communicate with each other. In the first rehearsal, five different students took solos. A tenor sax player improvised over the blues changes in *Splanky*, the bass player and

drummer “traded fours” in *Flashback* with the alto player joining them in *Fandango*, and *Yeah, Right* featured the tenor sax player again. Trading fours is when students solo collaboratively “passing” the solo back and forth to each other in four measure phrases. Dr. W told the drum-set player to “listen and see what comes to you.” In the next rehearsal, a few different pieces were played which gave students some new solo opportunities. *In The Mood* featured a tenor saxophonist and a trumpet player. The bassist soloed in *Flashback* and *Birdland*. The tenor sax player then improvised in *Yeah, Right*. The rehearsal really turned to soloing during *Milk and Cookies*. The alto saxophonist was the only player out of the nine students in attendance who answered when Dr. W asked “who does not want to solo?” Dr. W did not prod and let the student sit out. The rest of students took it “all around” for a solo section that passed from an alto saxophone to each of the three tenors, to the trumpet, a trombone, the bass player, and the drum-set player. The students were instructed to play through one chorus each. Since the bass player was also the melodic rhythmic section player during the solos, Dr. W told him that “as long as you start in F blues, you’ll be OK,” and “since you’re the only one you can harmonize however you want.” The students soloed comfortably and confidently and were not discouraged when they hit the occasional missed note. Students were not only expected to solo during pieces they were preparing for concert, but also during warm-ups. In the third rehearsal Dr. W asked, “who would like to solo?” A trumpet, trombone, bass and drum-set player responded positively. The bass was instructed to play F blues while the she partnered the trumpet and trombone player. The students “traded fours” over the bass and drum accompaniment as a way to warm the group up and get them listening and

communicating. In *Yeah, Right*, the rhythm section was told that they “make solos help the accompaniment come in” during the tenor sax solo. Dr. W reminded them that they are “what keeps the group together while a solo is taking place.” In the final rehearsal observed, the students warmed up over an improvised bass line in F mixolydian. The bass player was instructed to make it “a little slower and funkier.” The tenor sax player was complimented that his “solo sounded really nice,” after solos were traded between the trumpet, trombone, tenor saxes, and bass player in *Fandango*. In the next piece, a student asked “are we soloing?” and Dr. W responded, “Not tonight, I just want to get through it.”

Students would also often improvise with each other in their down time. Rehearsals often started with students “jamming” on their own, until rehearsal was called to officially start. Many times during a break the students would remain at their instruments and improvise with each other.

### *Discussion*

While both ensembles utilized improvisation in their concert pieces, the community music school students experienced a much more advanced and comprehensive use of the tool. More students in the community music school jazz big band improvised individually than at the public school, and those students also went further into their improvisations, working with each other in various different situations. As a result, the students were much more comfortable performing the task and greatly enjoyed being able to experience the music in that way. While the public school jazz

band did incorporate improvisation into their rehearsals, it was mostly a result of their concert repertoire having solo sections included. Based on the talent and ability of the of the students in both programs, it is fair to assume that students were provided with the tools and knowledge necessary to be successful at improvisation and soloing (appropriate key changes, melodic structure, phrasing, etc.), however none of this instruction was observed.

Neither the public school wind ensemble and concert band, nor the community music school wind ensemble met this standard during my observations. Since both groups were in final preparations for their concert, it may be assumed that preparation of concert repertoire took precedence during this time, and there is no evidence to prove that improvisation is not used during other times of the year. The fact the neither ensemble addressed a standard that is considered to be one of the nine most important things done in a music classroom is telling of the value placed on public performance in both settings. With upcoming performances, directors chose to focus purely on the performance aspect of music education. As with Standard One, students were not asked to improve their abilities in different aspects in music, but to repeatedly work on the same task until it was ready for public performance. This is a topic for further discussion.

**NATIONAL STANDARD #4:** Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.

*Public School*

None of the students in the public school wind ensemble, concert band, or jazz band were asked to compose or arrange music. This will be explored later in the discussion section.

While the students at the public school did not arrange or compose, Mr. M made changes in some of the jazz band pieces in an effort to make them more “authentic and exciting.” He felt that *Fantasy* needed a strong cadential moment at the end, so he instructed the bass player to add a “sol-do motion” to create more “finality and arrival.” Students were also asked to add a “fall” at the end of *Low Tide*, as well as adding a “stinger” to the end of *Fantasy*.

#### *Community Music School*

None of the students in wind ensemble or jazz big band were asked to compose or arrange music. This will be explored later in the discussion section.

Similarly to the approach taken by the public school director, Dr. W made changes to pieces in order to create more effective moments in the music. These changes usually involved the rhythm section, specifically the drumset part. Suggestions made to the drumset player included “create a set-up to take the group back to the melody,” play “something a little lighter” and “simpler” to make it easy for the rest of the group, and “wonder if you guys (rhythm section) should do anything to get us into that.” Dr. W also made melodic and harmonic changes. She gave the trombones an ostinato that would normally be played by the baritone sax and added a bass part on the A-flat blues for one piece. She also added a concert A to the end of the tenor saxophone written solo to

change the transition into the chorus. While Dr. W made changes to the music, most of them were suggestions with the students having the final say on what to do. This is another example of improvisation.

### *Discussion*

As with improvisation, composition and arranging were presented to the community music school students in a much more professional setting. They were not only given more responsibility in the arranging of the music, but they also seemed to have more tools to meet the vision of the director.

Unfortunately, a pattern emerged in the analysis. The students in every ensemble, at all sites observed, were not asked to compose or arrange. Once again, performance preparation took precedence over providing students with an opportunity to work on this standard. As with improvisation, composing and arranging was a tool used only by the teacher in order to fix problems in the performance pieces. This finding should be the basis for further research regarding the role that these standards play in instrumental secondary music education.

**NATIONAL STANDARD #5:** Reading and notating music.

### *Public School*

The concert band and wind ensemble students were able to read fluently the music they were rehearsing. This was evidenced in their ability to understand instruction



that specifically asked them to look at and understand the notation in their music. In the first rehearsal, Mr. M advised them to “watch accidentals,” while asking them to begin “the measure before the fermata.” In the second rehearsal, students were instructed to get “quiet at the beginning of the crescendo.” In the fourth observation, students in the wind ensemble warmed up with a passage from their music. They also needed to identify pick-ups, rehearsal marks, and “that triplet part” in the saxophones. Throughout all of the rehearsals, students were actively engaged in reading music.

In the public school jazz band, students were similarly engaged in music reading and using that skill to follow instruction. Students were reminded that a “forte-piano is not the same as a sforzando” in *Fantasy*, and told to be “a little more legato on the tenuto marking.” In one rehearsal, Mr. M asked students to “look at the rhythm” and compare it a measure earlier in the piece. Students were reminded to “notice what articulation is over that tie,” and that “the thing with the two dots, that’s the repeat.” In another rehearsal, students were asked to look at the time signature and understand that “it’s four-four, not cut time!” Students needed to work on the “crescendo on the tied note,” and “look at the those half notes.” Mr. M also advised the students on a few occasions to, “Take it home, go over it note by note.”

### *Community Music School*

As with students in the public school programs, students actively read music throughout their rehearsals. Students in the wind ensemble were asked to “raise your hand if you have the melody,” and whether or not they “Can do more of these things” in

reference to dynamics. Dr. D advised students in the second observation to “not be late” if they had eighth notes. At rehearsal measure 115, he asked for everybody who did not have sixteenth notes to play. Saxophones were asked if they had cues in *Beachscapes*, while the whole band was asked if they had a *rallentando* printed in the same piece. Students were instructed “the first measure is not together. It’s the second beat, the triplets...do you know what I mean?” Dr. D really put an emphasis on reading in *Beachscapes* when he advised “This movement only works if we only do three things; 1. Play con brio, 2. Play all the articulations, 3. Dynamics.”

Two important points from Dr. D were his advice to students about sight-reading and communication. For sight-reading he explained to always look at the time signature, key signature, and accidentals first. He also advised “Don’t get lost.” Even if you’re watching notes go by, it’s important to know where you are.” For communication he simply stated, “You need to be looking at me, as well as at your music.”

In the jazz big band, Dr. W similarly expected the students to be able identify parts of their music in order to improve musically. In one rehearsal, Dr. W had the drumset player read from the score in order to see how the style changed throughout the piece. Dr. W also advised her students to “look at the next line while playing,” in order to anticipate what’s coming. The saxophones were warned of their “tricky part at E” and then challenged to play a part at one rehearsal mark, while the trombones played a different section. In one rehearsal, the altos kept coming in “one measure early” and miscounting their “four measures of holding.” Dr. W also spoke often on the importance of rests, and how the ensemble needed to “be good about what we don’t play.”

*Discussion*

All students in all ensembles read music for extended periods of time. The pieces students read were advanced and required advanced knowledge and experience to understand. In order to rehearse, students needed to be able to identify rehearsal markings, dynamics, articulations, and other notation.

It is important to mention that none of the groups were observed sight-reading. As with other standards, this could be an indicator of the importance placed on rehearsing pieces for performance, versus working on other skills. While Dr. D discussed sight-reading, it was directed to students sitting in on the rehearsal, and not members of the ensemble. It should be noted that the standards do not explicitly discuss sight-reading, although it is a universally expected skill for students auditioning for festivals, select ensembles, and colleges throughout the country.

**NATIONAL STANDARD #6:** Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.

*Public School*

The concert band and wind ensemble were encouraged to listen to each other for tuning and intonation purposes, once being told to “please watch and listen.” They were also often instructed to look at their music with an understanding of theory, such as, “Watch the leading tones,” and “What is A# enharmonic also known as?” Referring to the brass section, Mr. M noted “we’re not hearing it,” in reference to their pitches. Mr. M

asked the clarinets “Why did you switch to longer eighth notes two before B? Keep them the same.” Students were also often expected to adjust their performance as they played as Mr. M would call out instructions and comments while he conducted. He commented on expression; “more expressive with the lines,” and “peak the hills”; articulation, “too much tongues”; note issues “register issues,” and “one player is off, boy can you hear it”; and tempo “it’s rushing,” “little timing thing there at the end,” and “a little tempo disconnect.”

The public school jazz band used listening as a tool to analyze the theory behind their pieces. Students were asked to identify intervals; “what kind of intervals are your first notes;” chord progressions “what’s the chord before the resolution;” articulations “what’s the articulation on that lick;” and leading tones “which is the leading tone?” Students were told “if they (alto saxophones) move, don’t be afraid to adjust,” and to “think of it as the leading tone,” so they would not be flat. Students also listened for and identified cadences, pentatonic versus major scales, and suspended resolutions. Mr. M also asked students to listen to original recordings of their pieces.

#### *Rhode Island Community Music School*

The wind ensemble utilized listening to work on balance, timing, intonation and other important aspects of their concert preparation. Dr. D asked students to “raise your hand if you have the melody.” Dr. D would often challenge the students to understand the parts around them through listening and analyzing. Dr. D asked each student in the ensemble to “listen to at least two other lines” while playing. Other instructions included,

“Listen to what they’re doing, it’s very cool,” “Listen to the horns before you come in,” “Clarinets make sure we listen to the flutes,” and “Listen to the bassoon in measures one-hundred one and one-hundred two.” Students listened for musical structure, form, and instrumentation, such as canons, “chamber-esque” moments, melody versus accompaniment, ostinato, recapitulations, and chordal structure. Dr. D also singled out sections of the ensemble to play on their own, in order to allow the other students to hear more clearly what they should be listening for.

It could be argued that through its extensive work in improvisation and arranging, the jazz big band was also actively listening and analyzing music in their rehearsals. The students listened for chord changes during their solos in order to evaluate what to do next, as well as listening to each other solo. Dr. W picked out certain lines and parts to highlight for the rest of the group to listen to. She often instructed the students to “listen to the rhythm section.” Dr. W also instructed the students practice with recordings at home.

### *Discussion*

All of the students were expected to actively listen and analyze the music they were preparing; however, none of the students provided their own verbal analysis and description of the music. The conductors of the ensemble provided all analysis and described what the music should sound like. I did not observe any students listening to recordings of music, nor did they analyze or describe their music formally. Students in both settings were spoken to as if they had an understanding of music theory and

analysis, though no overt instruction in these skills was observed. This may be another result of the “pressure to perform” that does not allow for in-depth music analysis.

**NATIONAL STANDARD #7:** Evaluating music and music performances.

Evaluation of the music and performance was a constant part of the conductor’s instruction in all ensembles. Students were not always engaged in the active evaluation of the ensemble, however they were encouraged to think critically about their own performance and preparation. It was surprising in the almost twenty hour of observations to only hear the students asked once “Any thoughts?” The answer from a jazz big band student was “confusing.” Another member quipped, “I don’t think we did it right.” Students evaluated their performances on a superficial level, with no further discussion.

I do know that both groups actively record performances and evaluate during post-concert rehearsals; however, I did not observe either group perform this evaluation. Once again, in the final preparations for the concert, very little other than practicing of performance pieces was done.

**NATIONAL STANDARD #8:** Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.

Very few examples of this standard were observed during my observations; however, both sites made connections between the musical terms in their music and the meaning of those terms in Italian. Public school students were taught about the meaning of words such as *tenuto* and *legato*, while community music school students were taught

the meaning of *con brio*, *sostenuto*, *morendo*, *tutti*, *dolce*, and *espressivo*. One example of music relating to science occurred Dr. D asked why the glockenspiel is tuned two cents higher than the tuning note.

**NATIONAL STANDARD #9:** Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Neither ensemble in the public school demonstrated this standard. The singular example of this in the community music school wind ensemble was that Dr. D read the the program notes from each concert piece. This allowed the students to connect any historical importance to the pieces. Their concert pieces connected to history related to Great Britain, New England, early American settlers and the Bible. Dr. W spoke to her students about how free and how much space they were playing with telling them she “heard a little bit of James Brown,” a reference the students seemed to enjoy and appreciate. She also spoke with them about Count Basie and his style.

### **National Standards Summary**

The only standards that all four ensembles successfully met were Standard Two (performing) and Standard Five (reading). Examples of students improvising, Standard 3, were limited to the jazz ensembles at each site. Standards One (singing), Four (composing and arranging), and Seven (evaluating) were all skills mostly performed by the instructor. There were few examples of students connecting music with other subjects (Standard Eight) and history (Standard Nine). While students needed to actively listen and analyze their performance (Standard Six), they were never asked to make formal

analysis and description. Student only listened to themselves perform live during rehearsals, not the recordings of other ensembles (although they were encouraged to do so at home).

This analysis leads to the question of whether or not performance based ensembles lack a well-rounded music education based on the national standards. While performing is key to their success, and therefore a standard easily met, all of the other standards are used only in order to improve music for performance. Students are trusted to individually listen, analyze, and evaluate, but they are not allotted time and tools to do so together or assess their ability at each skill.

There were disparities between the two sites in many standards. Community music school students played more repertoire, improvised more extensively, were taught about history, and were encouraged to look at their music through analytical and theoretical lenses. The reason for these disparities will be explored in the next section of analysis, which explores the themes that emerged during analysis.

## **PART II: THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM ANALYSIS**

### Research Questions

4. Do the two school settings experience non-musical factors? If so, how are they



similar and different?

5. How do the observed non-musical factors affect the music education of the students in each setting, as described through the National Standards of Music Education?

### **Location/Culture**

#### *Public School*

The band room is relatively new in comparison to the rest of the building. The room was part of a new wing that was approximately two years old. The room was specially built for the program and is acoustically designed and outfitted with instrument lockers. The room is large, tiled, air-conditioned, well lit and across the hallway from a smaller rehearsal space and the music directors' office. There was plenty of equipment for the students to use. The room was kept clear when not in use, with students both setting up and breaking down their spots for every rehearsal. The walls were lined with the many awards and trophies that the band program has won over the years, most of which from the Berklee Jazz Festival and various marching competitions.

Figure 1

*The Rhode Island Public School Band Room*



Figure 1

*The Rhode Island Community Music School*

Walking into the Rhode Island Community Music School, known as the Carter Center for Music Education and Performance, felt like being back in a collegiate musical setting. Located in East Providence, the building is relatively new, clearly designed for its purpose and the “largest and newest dedicated community music school facility in New England.” Every room is clean, well-lit, climate controlled with professional level acoustics, equipment, and resources. There are three long hallways of practice rooms, rehearsal spaces (both large and small), private studios, and even specialized areas for music therapy, Suzuki instruction, early childhood music, and recording. In total, there are thirty-one private studios, two large recital-rehearsal halls and a designated wing for early childhood music, Suzuki and music therapy, as well as a jazz, rock and blues wing. The people, from the lobby secretary to the parent dropping their child off, are friendly and welcoming. Everybody seems to understand that if you are in the building, you are a patron of the arts, a supporter of the same cause.

My observations for the Rhode Island Community Youth Wind Ensemble took place in a large rehearsal space that easily fit the large ensemble. Music school employees set up the room before the students arrived. Chairs and stands were all neatly organized and students knew their exact seat and stand. The room was also fully equipped with recording equipment and playback functions.

Figure 2

*Rehearsal Space in the Rhode Island Community Music School*



Figure 2

*Discussion*

Both locations are comparable in terms of space, equipment, and professional setting. The band room at the public school was newly renovated and probably not indicative of most public school band rooms, however it was representative of what public schools could have with the resources, time and interest.

## **Scheduling**

### *Public School*

The Concert Band/Wind Ensemble met every day during the school year for approximately forty-five minutes. The two ensembles would split the time depending on rehearsal needs and upcoming performances. These times always fell at some point during the school day. Students were never required to attend any before or after-school rehearsals. Due to the nature of public school education, this often meant that class was altered or even cancelled. On one occasion during my observations, the class was cancelled due to New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) testing, while another rehearsal was missing the sophomore class due to an assembly. This cancelled rehearsal also happened to fall on the week of the band concert, eliminating a very important prep rehearsal for the concert..

The jazz band met before the school day. They rehearsed two days a week for forty-five minutes. Students needed to be ready to play at 6:45 am.

### *Rhode Island Community Music School*

The Rhode Island Community Youth Wind Ensemble rehearsed two times a week for two hours. They met in the evening on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the duration of the school year.

The Rhode Island Community Big Band met once a week at night for one and a half hours of rehearsal.

### *Discussion*

While the high school students in the public school concert band and wind ensemble rehearsed every day of the academic year, their rehearsal time only amounted to less than twenty minutes after set-up, splitting the rehearsal, and break –down. Since rehearsals were during the school day, the school did not hesitate to remove students from band for assemblies, testing, field trips, awards ceremonies and various other events that occur throughout the year. Students were removed from class regardless of concert and performance schedule.

The community music school students had an advantage with meeting in the evening outside of the school day, but there were some conflicts with playoff baseball season in full swing. Most students felt more attentive at those rehearsals, but also maybe a little tired from the long day they had already endured. Although students did not rehearse daily, as the public school students did, they still rehearsed fifteen total minutes longer per week (two-hundred and forty minutes versus two-hundred and twenty-five minutes).

### **Rapport**

The rapport of each location was assessed based on the “memorable quotes” section of the observation form. The instruction provided is not only important for the musical standards met, but also for the way it is conveyed. The personality and presence of a conductor can have great importance on the success of an ensemble. Fortunately for all of the students involved, dynamic, knowledgeable, and passionate directors lead the different programs.

According to answers from the surveys distributed to, two students specifically listed Dr. D as a reason they enjoy the ensemble, even calling him “more experienced” than their high school band directors. Another student described Dr. D as “less harsh and kinder, but equally successful,” as his high school band director.

This section can be broken up into themes that emerged from this research: themes include Discipline/Disappointment, Encouragement/Praise, and Humor.

### **Discipline/Disappointment**

Very little discipline was needed in both ensembles. The students were overall very well behaved, yet there are always students that are not as focused and prepared as they could be. Disappointment refers to the way the director let the students know they were not working hard enough.

#### *Public School*

Mr. M had to remind the students to “not let him see the dreaded cell phone.” Other than the occasional “shh” to be quiet, this band was otherwise very well behaved.

Examples of the director showing disappointment in students include remarking how a percussionist hadn't been to rehearsal in awhile and asked somebody else to cover his part, telling the trumpet soloist that the "fullness of solo was off," telling the clarinets that "one player is off, boy can you hear it," and other general comments about clarity of rhythms and articulations.

In jazz band students were told to "take it home, go over it note by note," when a part wasn't coming together. After explaining the difficulties of playing funk, Mr. M told the students that they "don't have their funk on today," and trumpets attention to key signature brought him to an "oy vey" another rehearsal.

### *Community Music School*

The first rehearsal of the wind ensemble that I observed started with Dr. D enthusiastically shushing the students and asking for "Quiet!" He also reminded the students that it was "focus time." There was no need past this for the students to be disciplined, or even directed to focus. There were, however, plenty of examples of students needing musical redirection. Dr. D was very straightforward with students about their individual performance. He asked a trombone player whether a part was written incorrectly, but the student admitted that it was "just a bad playing," a tuba player was also asked about a "funky note," and at another point a student was asked whether they were lost, which they were. The students were told that the music "sounds hard, it needs to sound effortless." When the ensemble experienced a large tear in tempo, they were

told, “whatever you do, you can’t do that!,” while the low brass section was kindly reminded to “work on those sections for me.”

Although there was a much more relaxed rehearsal approach in the jazz big band, students were still expected to be focused and prepared. Sometime students freely had their cell phones out and were playing in between instructions, but they always got down to work when they were prompted with Dr. W’s “Are you ready?” A few times, the horn section had to be reminded that they should have their “horns up if you got something to play.” Dr. W did not hesitate to correct the students through their mistakes. When the tempo was brisker than it should have been, the students were told that at least “that made the rough parts go faster.” When parts were not accurate, students were simply told “some interesting things happened” during the rep, and that “for some reason, we’re not playing it as naturally.”

Two student surveys stated the wind ensemble was different than their school ensemble with discipline. One student felt that the ensemble was much more serious and focused “Students in my high school ensemble don’t work as hard as students here”, while another student said their high school ensemble required less discipline “sometimes this ensemble can be unfocused, my high school band is very serious.”

### **Encouragement/Praise**

While all of the students needed to be reminded to practice, watch their notes and rhythms, and to watch the conductor, there were many things that they were doing well. All of the directors involved made sure to praise and encourage their students when deserved and needed.



*Public School*

Mr. M was sure to let his students know when they were performing well. They were told that their music was “getting to be like a well-oiled machine,” and that they were getting “better and better.” Students were also informed that their playing was “not bad, actually quite good,” right before the concert.

In the jazz band, earned an “excellent job,” and a “perfect rhythm section.” Mr. M was sure to end every rehearsal with a positive comment for the day.

*Community Music School*

The wind ensemble students were praised for their hard work and accomplishments, although these comments often included an extra challenge, such as “Good! Now play it like you mean it!” Dr. D also told the students they were “excellent,” and complimented specific moments and students. Examples include him telling the trumpets that he “liked the annunciation of the articulation,” and commenting on the french horn rips as “great.” He told students that “a lot of this is so much better, I’m pleased,” and that it was “very good, a lot of nice playing.” Dr. D even thanked the students for their playing and the musical moments they were creating.

Students in the jazz big band received praise for the energy and style that they put into their music. Dr. W told the rhythm sections that she “likes what you guys are doing, very cool,” while telling the band as a whole that they were playing “very, very nice,” that it had “very nice energy,” and that it “sounded great everybody!” In regards to their

upcoming performance they were told, “In a hall with people and energy, I think it’s going to be a smash” and that they were “read to play for those who know us and love us.”

### **Humor**

There were a few noteworthy moments of humor, specifically from Dr. D. In reference to the Sousa piece, *The Rose, Shamrock and Thistle*, the students were told that measure “184 become dynasty, royal monarchy, in England, over the pond, where they speak English funny.” He also threatened “whoever plays in the rest sends the Conductor to Aruba,” and quipped after their next perfect execution that they “proved that you’re true professionals, as soon as I mention money, you fix it!”

### *Discussion*

While all of the educators had the respect of the students and a positive relationship with them, the teachers at the community music school seemed to have more time and freedom with the students. They were able to joke more, spend more time relating to the students, and create a general sense of community. Without having to teach within the public school world, the educators were freer to create the classrooms that they wanted.

### **Interruptions**

#### *Public School*

The had to often deal with interruptions to classroom instruction. Interruptions came in the form of announcements being made over the loudspeaker during rehearsal, the teachers getting calls from the office or other teachers that they had to take, students being called out of the classroom/coming in late, and having to talk about extra-curricular/school wide events going on. These interruptions occurred over the intercom, telephone calls, and teachers calling students out in person. The biggest interruptions came when the sophomore students had state testing to take and they were unable to attend band class and another rehearsal that was completely cancelled due to an assembly. Interruptions were a daily happening and something that the band directors had become accustomed to.

### *Community Music School*

The ensembles did not have to deal with any of the same interruptions that the public school groups did. The one instance of an interruption was the students from a certain school had a playoff baseball game the same night as a big band rehearsal. There were three students missing from rehearsal that night.

Student surveys reflected the challenge of public school band programs and the issues they deal with during the day. Students felt the “night-time rehearsals” lends themselves to a much more intense experience versus being school.

### **Difficulty and Challenge of Ensemble and Repertoire**

An overwhelming amount of students surveyed felt they were challenged musically in the wind ensemble. Twenty-one out of thirty public school students, nine out of twelve private school students, and five out of nine non-specified students prepared more for the community music school wind ensemble than their school ensemble. The general consensus can be summed up by one public school student's answer:

“I actually have to practice this music in order to play it well. I can practically sight-read my high school ensemble music perfectly because kids who have less passion and devotion to music have to be able to play it perfectly.”

The student sums up the idea that her high school plays easier music in order to achieve a higher level of performance from the entire band, not just the advanced students. Her band director chooses music that the less committed students can still succeed at.

Students also reflected that they were more challenged, fulfilled, and saw the power and passion of music in the wind ensemble. Ten students identified “difficulty and quality” of music as the major difference between their school ensemble and the wind ensemble.

**RESEARCH QUESTION #5:** How do the non-musical similarities/differences affect the implementation of the National Standards of Music Education?

The major difference between the two settings abilities to implement the National Standards was time. The public school band students were split into two ensembles, the Concert Band and the Wind Ensemble, yet rehearsed during a single period. The public school concert band and wind ensemble had twenty minutes a day each to work on their repertoire, in contrast to the community music school, which rehearsed in two hour blocks twice a week. That comes out to an hour and twenty minutes worth of rehearsal for public school students and 4 hours for community music school wind ensemble students. This had a major impact on the amount of repertoire performed. In addition to the shortened rehearsals, public school ensembles had to deal with almost constant interruptions. The first rehearsal I attended ended early for a senior meeting. A parent came to talk to the students about volunteering at their booth at Gillette stadium for fundraising purposes during the second rehearsal. The third rehearsal was cancelled completely due to NECAP testing for the juniors and the need to set-up the stage for concerts. The last rehearsal, which was after the concert, had students leaving halfway through for a field trip and the rehearsal starting approximately ten minutes late, simply due to Mr. M dealing with logistics of the day. In contrast, the community music school wind ensemble saw zero interruptions in addition to the students not having to set up the space themselves.

Due to the public school jazz band rehearsing before school there were fewer interruptions; however, the early start often lead to rehearsal starting later than scheduled. On two separate observations, the rehearsal started ten to fifteen minutes late. The community music school jazz big band did have attendance issues due to playoff baseball

games, but these were actually less disruptive than interruptions during rehearsal. All other rehearsals were an hour and a half of focused playing. This allowed for the students to dive much deeper into improvisation, as well as play significantly more repertoire.

Increased time with students will always lead to the ability to provide a variety of educational and musical experiences. While the community music school ensembles benefited musically from a significant increase in rehearsal time, they still did not meet many of the national standards. This is not attributed to time and ability, but on a “pressure to perform.” This discussion will be explored further in the recommendations for future research.

### *Summary*

Research questions four and five potentially uncovered the underlying factors to the variance in national standards implementation. Non-musical factors emerged that greatly affected the public school’s ensembles time on task. Scheduling issues combined with near constant interruptions were the most glaring differences between the locations. The locations were comparable with discipline, rapport between the director and the students, and the general culture of the site.

## CHAPTER V - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this comparative case study was to investigate, explore, and describe the methods and practices of high school instrumental music education as demonstrated by a Rhode Island public school and a Rhode Island community music school setting, in order to further understand the nature of public school music education. The study used a program evaluation based on the National Standards of Music Education. The research questions were:

1. What does secondary music education in a Rhode Island Public School look like, as described through the National Standards of Music Education?
2. What does secondary music education in a Rhode Island Community Music School look like, as described through the National Standards of Music Education?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the two settings approaches towards music education, as described through the National Standards of Music Education?
4. Do the two school settings experience non-musical factors? If so, how are they similar and different?
5. How do the observed non-musical factors affect the music education of the students in each setting, as described through the National Standards of Music Education?

The research showed that the community music school was both successful and lacking in their meeting of the National Standards. While both ensembles played and

read music, only the Big Band explored improvisation, composing, and arranging. Both ensembles spoke briefly about history, but at only a surface level. Students were expected to analyze and evaluate their performances, though not the performances of others.

In the Rhode Island Public School, a majority of the students attending ensemble rehearsal were not being taught through a standards based approach. With an emphasis placed on upcoming performances, rehearsal time was devoted to cleaning concert pieces versus learning and working on the various standards. A lack of rehearsal time combined community and administrative expectations of performance quality contributed to the focus of the program.

The community music school and the public school ensembles both had a performance-based approach that limited their ability to meet the National Standards. This approach focused solely on Standard 2 (performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music) and the reading portion of Standard 5 (reading and notating music). Although not told to do so explicitly, students were also expected to evaluate music and music performances,“(Standard 7). None of the students were expected to sing a varied repertoire of music (Standard 1), notate music (Standard 5), and explore music in relation to the other arts and disciplines outside the arts (Standard 8), and history and culture (Standard 9). While students in both locations critiqued their own performances, none of them were asked to “listen, analyze, and describe music” (Standard 6) or “evaluate music and music performance” (Standard 7) of outside



ensembles or repertoire. There was no exploration of different composers or music theory.

Overall, both locations struggled to meet the standards in their ensemble rehearsals. It is important to note that this is not a shortcoming of the educator, but rather a reflection of the approach taken. Standards were not given importance or emphasis purposefully, due to the desire to focus on the preparation for performance. Both the public school and the community music school educators recognize the importance of quality performance in the advocacy and growth of their programs.

The lack of a comprehensive approach to the national standards was the first of many themes that emerged from the research. The research was not interested in exploring the director's ability to address the standards, but it became apparent through the observations that a lack of education through the standards was apparent at both sites.

The non-musical similarities and differences between the two programs is significant. While both schools had comparable rehearsal spaces that were clean, well lit, and temperature controlled, the similarities ended there. Students at the community music school arrived at the school with a singular purpose, music. Students at the public school were faced with a full day of school, combined with tests, assemblies, trips, clubs, sports, and other parts of the average high school student's experience. Ensemble rehearsal was a small part of their day that was often cancelled or disrupted due to the nature of their environment. Students being called out of class, entire grades missing, rehearsal being cancelled were just a few of the non-musical issues that the public school

faced in just a two week observation period. These interruptions are magnified by the fact that they occurred during the ensembles final concert preparations.

The non-musical similarities were a slight indicator of the ensembles' ability to implement the standards, solely because of time. The community music school ensembles had more time with students and therefore happened to stumble upon some standards-based moments, but it was unclear whether that was intended. As noted previously, neither location focused their teaching through the standards.

Going into this research, my intentions were to further understand the state of secondary instrumental music education. As the observations progressed, the information gained on the musical aspects of the sites took a back seat to the prevalence of non-musical obstacles that stand in a public school educator's way. These are the other unexpected themes that emerged from the research. The world of the community music school is unique and ideal. This would not be of much importance in comparison to a public school, if it were not for the fact that the goals of the community music school and the public school music department are exactly the same. Educating students, creating musicians, performing for public events, and advocating for the arts are all part of each programs philosophy. Creating a product that will be consumed by the public (including parents, administrators, community members and fellow students) is the culmination of each program's efforts. In the community music school world, students have one responsibility around concert time: to be prepared and present. All rehearsals leading up to the performance are a priority that students and parents understand. In the public

school, students were removed from rehearsals the week of the concert. There was no importance placed on the music program by the school administration, yet the standards of performance were not lowered.

Public school music educators are expected to do more with less. Performance, while not the only goal, is the public presentation of what students have learned. Educators are expected to put out high-level performances even while losing students to testing, assemblies, and other obstacles. Rehearsals in the public school were focused, yet hurried. They felt like both the students and the educators knew that time was not on their side. Having approximately twenty minutes a day to rehearse through an entire concert program created a sense of “have to get through this,” as opposed to the community music school feeling of “have to understand this.” The ensembles at the community music school had the time to break sections down, focus on certain moments for considerable amounts of time, and create a relaxed, yet professional environment.

The research has strengthened my concerns for the current state of public school music education. Building on my own personal experiences and the conversations I have had with fellow educators, the research has created a baseline for what I believe to be the current realities for educators across the country. The major issue that has to be dealt with is time. Time with students is a reflection of a school’s schedule, their budget, and their commitment to supporting the arts. Music students in the public school suffered from their district’s willingness to sacrifice time. In my own school district, full band time is also the time when all of the full school assemblies and events take place. While students

would never be expected to miss a core class for a spelling bee or to play name that tune, band class is deemed the appropriate time to have such events.

Having taught mostly in a middle school, I was naïve to the additional problems that high school educators face. In addition to state testing and basic scheduling issues, this research reminded me that high school educators are working within a system that is preparing to send students to college, with additional importance placed on core subjects and standardized tests. Students are pulled from band class to receive additional time on math and English, as well as guidance appointments needed to help the students navigate college applications and SATs. Seniors also graduate weeks early, leaving the band without its oldest and most experienced members.

In addition to the non-musical constraints on the public school educator, the actual role of the high school music educator is also more complex. High school directors felt they needed to be the eyes and ears of the districts music programs. Being the most public ensembles of the department, educators felt the responsibility of advocating for the entire performing arts department.

Recommendations for future research are varied, but equally pressing. These recommendations fall under both the qualitative and quantitative branches of educational research. As described by Creswell (2002), quantitative research is “explanation-oriented,” while qualitative research is “understanding-oriented” (p. 51). I personally believe that in order to explain something, you must understand it.

A first recommendation for philosophical research is to explore the basic understanding of the standards and how they apply to the current music classroom. Are the standards important in the eyes of today's music educators, or are they just the brainchild of an organization that may represent more of the idealized side of a very real and practiced subject? Does the role of the standards vary by type of classroom (general music vs. ensemble rehearsal), or by grade level (kindergarten to high school)? An understanding of the sole unifier of what music education "should be" will provide a baseline for understanding the practices and methods of classrooms around the country. My research uncovered a lack of discipline in relation to the standards at two high achieving and respected settings. This may be an indicator of a larger theme in today's music classroom. Stake (1995) states that "single cases are not as strong a base for generalizing to a population of cases as other research designs. But people can learn much that is general from single cases" (p. 85).

Quantitative research may be conducted to explain the affects of loss of time in the ensemble setting. How do interruptions in classroom time, both large and small, affect the prolonged education of student musicians? Education is focused on "time on task" and music research can benefit from exploring this issue, as well. Research could also focus on a singular school system over an extended period of time. Observations over an entire school year would illuminate much more on the state of music education in a public school.

The results of this research have changed the way I approach my own classroom. As Creswell (2002) notes “research offers practicing educators new ideas to consider as they go about their jobs” (pg. 5). I have moved my jazz ensemble and percussion ensemble rehearsals from after-school to evening. The idea of taking an ensemble and placing it outside of the school day has greatly changed my own students approach and commitment. Students return more focused, determined, and excited to be at rehearsal. When rehearsal was right after-school, students were lethargic, distracted, and overwhelmed by other afterschool activities and responsibilities. Since the move to evening numbers, the numbers in my both ensembles have doubled and the performances have improved significantly.

I have also taken on a composing project with my full band. While I have always had students compose in their lessons, I also have a performance-based approach in my full ensemble rehearsal. My seventh grade band has composed a piece together that we will perform at our next concert. While it takes away from the rehearsal of concert pieces, it has created a sense of ownership and understanding of music that I have never seen from my students.

I have brought improvisation into my small group lessons. Improvisation was exclusively a skill taught in jazz band. After creating a simply 12 bar blues lesson, I introduced improvisation into band lessons and have seen an unbelievable reaction from students. After initial hesitation, all of the students performed solos and have since asked to work on it more.

The last change to my own teaching is the creation of the “bring a buddy to band day!” The community music school wind ensemble had a recruitment day where students would bring interested friends into a rehearsal. The ensemble would play for them and show them why the ensemble was a fulfilling and worthwhile experience. As an educator without a feeder program, I am responsible for starting interested sixth grade students in band. Sixth grade also marks the switch to middle school and many students are overwhelmed by it all in the first few months of school and are afraid to join band or orchestra. After our first concert in December, students bring a friend to the band who is interested but never signed up. This year alone, sixteen new students joined the band due to this program. Students who had a desire to join band, but needed a few months to settle into the world of middle school now have a second chance to become a part of the program. Some of my most committed students and brightest stars have joined during that second chance through the years.

This study was an important stepping-stone for my future research in what is happening in today’s music classrooms. Much recent research focuses on why music programs are important; my research focused on what we do once we are already an important part of the school day. Research highlighting the importance of music in a school day often represents ideal situations, yet it is necessary to understand the realistic state of public school education. This area of research is important because we are not appropriately preparing future educators for the realistic issues they will face.

We are also not providing resources to educators currently in these situations. All music educators understand why we teach, and why our students need it. Educators need more help on how, rather than what and why. How do we work when our time is constantly being taken from us? How do we succeed when it seems as though nobody else cares if we do? How do we build a program that is barely given the chance to succeed the way it is? Music education cannot be expected to thrive in a world where professional orchestras are filing for bankruptcy and anybody with a MacBook can “make music,” unless we strive to understand the current climate of education and our society. Something needs to be done about helping music educators not just deal with, but conquer the issues facing them today. Research is the greatest tool for understanding, creating, and tackling the world in front of us.



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## **Appendix**

**I. Blank Observation Form**

**II. Blank Survey Form**

Observation Report Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Total Hours \_\_\_\_\_

***National Standards***

General Questions/Observations

1. Singing, alone and with others a varied repertoire of music.
  
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
  
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments
  
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.

Observation Report Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_ Total Hours \_\_\_\_\_

5. Reading and notating music.

6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.

7. Evaluating music and music performances.

8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, disciplines outside the arts.

9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

**Community Music School Wind Ensemble Member Survey**

(This is anonymous so please feel free to be as honest as possible!)

1. Describe how this ensemble compares to your high school ensemble.
2. In what ways do you prepare differently for this ensemble than you do for your high school ensemble?
3. Describe how your private lessons relate to your work in your school ensemble and this ensemble. Are they similar/different?
4. Do you plan on pursuing music after high school? How have your school ensemble and this ensemble affected that decision?
5. How do you feel your life (musically, socially, personally) has changed because of this ensemble?