

**Recent High School Graduates' Decisions Regarding High School Band Participation: A Phenomenological Study**

by

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## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover why students chose to remain in high school band for four years or drop before they finished high school. The following research questions (RQ) guided this study:

1. What motivated participants to join band?
2. What challenges or barriers did participants encounter to remaining in band?
3. What supports or encouragements did participants encounter to remaining in band?
4. How do participants describe their decision to remain in their band program for four years or drop band during high school?

This research used phenomenology to reconstruct participants' recollected experiences, develop themes, and discover the overarching essence of their experiences in high school band. Participants were adult former high school band students recruited from the Southeastern United States, particularly Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee. I recruited a purposeful sample of 20 college students; 10 students who remained enrolled in band until high school graduation and 10 who elected to drop band before high school graduation. Band director colleagues responded to a social media post asking for volunteers to assist with recruiting student participants. Student participants interviewed about their lived experiences in high school band and why they remained enrolled through high school or elected to drop band.

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim using Microsoft *Word* and entered into *ATLAS.ti 22* software to support the iterative data analysis process. Member checking of interview transcripts, peer review, and journaling ensured dependability. Following the interviews, a review of interview transcripts determined concept codes. The concept codes were then used in a phenomenological reduction to discover themes.

The iterative data analysis process revealed the following themes for each RQ: motivation (RQ1), overall experience (RQ2), relationships (RQ3), and uncertainty (RQ4). All participants expressed motivation to join band because of interest, family and friends, instrument choice, or love of music (RQ1). Students who remained in band encountered the challenges for the potential of regret and time management which influenced their overall experience (RQ2). Students who received support and encouragement from a positive experience, band director connection, or community and family remained in band because of relationships (RQ3). Students who remained in band had uncertainties, but decided to stay based on enjoyment, friendships, and opportunities (RQ4). Students who left band had conflicting organizations, friend influence, stress, or problems with time (RQ4).

The encompassing idea of the previously stated themes, or essence, was *priorities*, specifically the emphasis one places on their *priorities*. The four themes found in this research play a role in determining student *priorities*. Individuals in this study who *prioritized* band did not regret it; they appreciated their experience and remained in band. However, participants who did not *prioritize* band left the organization. Band directors can use the findings in this study to better inform their recruiting and retention strategies. These findings also express information regarding the impact of positive director student relationships.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background

Retaining students in high school band each year has become an increasing concern for many band directors in the United States (Abeles, 2004; Adderley et al., 2003; Helton & Paetz, 2021). At the high school level, band is an elective class that demands prerequisite training and skill building, usually from a middle or junior high school program. Student retention is essential for high school bands (HSB) as performance demands and tight scheduling make recruiting beginning band students at the high school level prohibitive. “Nurturing students already engaged with music appears to be a more sustainable strategy for a program than trying to recruit new students in each and every grade” (Tucker & Winsler, 2023, p. 24). Maintaining a flourishing HSB program hinges on retaining students, as without their participation, such programs cannot thrive or exist (Abeles, 2004; Adderley et al., 2003; Helton & Paetz, 2021). It is also important to note that students who leave band miss out on numerous musical and non-musical benefits, including lifelong learning skills they can use beyond their high school years.

As music educators, we aim to recruit students by promoting band participation as a healthy activity with various academic, musical, and social benefits. Academic benefits include positive correlations with increased academic achievement and an increased likelihood of college attendance (Elpus, 2022; Gibson, 2016; Gouzouasis et al., 2008). Social benefits include team building exercises, strong peer relationships, and learning to work towards a long-term goal for success (Elpus, 2022; Adderley et al., 2003; Tucker & Winsler, 2023). Also, it was suggested that arts education not only promotes healthy social and emotional learning for students, but it also creates stronger engagement within the school (Elpus, 2022). Increased school engagement

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results in benefits of better school attendance, higher graduation rates, and a greater chance of college attendance (Elpus, 2022). While participating in music ensembles was linked with positive social, behavioral, and academic outcomes, the most important outcome is developing individual musicianship (Adderley et al., 2003; Allsup, 2012; Gibson, 2016; Gouzouasis et al., 2008).

Many scholars have discussed the musical and non-musical benefits of music education. In most cases, these scholars spoke of music education in its entirety and did not specifically draw conclusions about a particular musical discipline or course of study. It can be inferred that band provides students with these same benefits. Including music classes in the school curriculum offers numerous benefits for students. Specifically, playing instruments and reading music notation can help students discover their intrinsic motivation (Gibson, 2016; Gouzouasis et al., 2008; NAFME, 2021; West, 2015). One of the goals of music education is to encourage students to become independent learners or develop personal agency (Floyd, 2015; Weidner, 2020). Agency allows students to make "satisfying music on your own..." and aids students with the ability to make critical decisions regarding music making (Weidner, 2020, p. 64). In 2021, The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) published a list of 19 benefits of teaching music to students in school:

Helps develop language and reasoning, gives a mastery of memorization, students learn to refine their work, increased coordination, a sense of achievement, kids stay engaged in school, success in society, emotional development, fine-tuned auditory skills, music builds imagination, intellectual curiosity, music is relaxing, music teaches discipline, preparation for the creative economy, development of creative thinking, develop spatial intelligence, teamwork, risk-taking, and self-confidence.

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Students who make critical, musical decisions gain lifelong musicianship “inside and outside of the school setting” (Weidner, 2020, p. 61). Lifelong musicians continue band through middle school, high school, and then college, and they are more likely to encourage their future children to be in the band (Weidner, 2020). Tucker and Winsler (2023) found the further along students progress in music, the more likely they are to continue music because they enjoy it. As directors work to create lifelong musicians as a part of their recruitment and retention process, it is essential to understand why students are choosing to stay in band programs and what is causing them to give up the benefits that musical activities in school offer.

Friends, parents, and teachers provide motivation and encouragement to students, or students may be motivated by a perceived reward, either tangible or intangible. Research shows parents encourage their children to participate in band because of the musical benefits of critical decision-making, music literacy, musical self-expression, critical listening skills, creativity, and lifelong musicianship, as well as the non-musical benefits of developing self-esteem, responsibility, and teamwork (Band Directors Talk Shop, 2019; Brown, 1985; Weidner, 2020). Additionally, in our current world of instant gratification and instant access to information at the swipe of a fingertip, band provides students with unique opportunities to think critically, reflect, and learn from failure (Band Directors Talk Shop, 2019). Research shows that participation in band provides students with skills such as persistence, responsibility, and the ability to focus. Most importantly, through band participation, students learn cooperation, shared workloads, and how to communicate with peers (Band Directors Talk Shop, 2019).

Enhanced brain function and general cognition have also been associated with music study (Band Directors Talk Shop, 2019; Madden, 2017). Multi-tasking through reading music, deciphering rhythms, and decoding symbols requires different brain areas to work in tandem to

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produce the desired musical results (Hodges & Wilkins, 2015). Consequently, producing sounds on a musical instrument is associated with developing fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and enhanced neural awareness (Hodges & Wilkins, 2015). Students may employ this type of higher order thinking and reasoning when responding to multisensory feedback from the visual cues of the ensemble conductor while performing musical phrases to produce a desired musical outcome (Band Directors Talk Shop, 2019; Madden, 2017)

Despite these myriad benefits to students’ musical growth, personal development, cognitive skills, social skills, and overall academic achievement, enrollment in band programs has decreased (Band Directors Talk Shop, 2019; Helton & Paetz, 2021). Researchers have identified possible contributing factors, including academic rigor, lack of musical growth on their instrument, lack of time for after-school or evening practices, loss of interest, and financial demands. Academic rigor has resulted in students having an ever-increasing list of tasks to complete for their classes (Gouzouasis et al., 2008). Many parents have encouraged their students to take more Advanced Placement (AP) courses leaving little time for a fine arts education (Elpus, 2022; Gouzouasis et al., 2008). Other factors included a lack of musical growth on their instrument, no time for after-school or evening practices, loss of interest, and financial demands (Elpus, 2022; Kinney, 2010). High school band students have also faced numerous challenges with their class schedules and personal schedules, which can prohibit remaining in high school band. Students must weigh the benefits and value of participating in band ensembles with other aspects of their high school experience to make the best decision (Gouzouasis et al., 2008; Kinney, 2010).

### **Need for the Study**

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover why students chose to remain in high school band for four years or drop out before they finished high school. While recruiting and retaining students in band programs as they progress through their schooling is an important topic for music educators, little empirical research is available on this topic. This study will contribute to current literature regarding student motivations for band participation and may provide band directors with ideas for recruitment and retention.

### **Research Questions**

The interview protocol was developed to discover answers to the following research questions:

1. What motivated participants to join band?
2. What challenges or barriers did participants encounter to remaining in band?
3. What supports or encouragements did participants encounter to remain in band?
4. How do the participants describe their decision to remain in their band program for four years or drop band during high school?

### **Positionality**

I am a high school band director who grew up in a family that valued music and academics. My father was a middle school band director for 37 years, and my mother was a middle school social studies teacher for 34 years. I began playing trumpet in my father's band at an early age, even before I was in middle school. After graduating high school, I received a bachelor's degree in trumpet performance and music education and have taught high school band for 17 years. The positive experiences I had growing up with my father's band, high school, and college band significantly influenced the person I am today. I believe being in band is a worthwhile endeavor that has a lasting impact on a child's life and future.



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I conducted this study to better understand the reasons why students drop out of band. In my current teaching situation, I want to understand why my students are dropping band from Junior to Senior year. Each year I have what I perceive as extremely dedicated students make the decision to drop out of band from their Junior to Senior year. I want to understand why students make this decision to not complete four years of high school band. This study represents my interest in understanding students' decision-making by exploring their lived experiences in band and what motivates them to choose to continue participation in band.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations**

#### ***Assumptions***

While conducting this research, I assumed participants responded to interview questions truthfully and without bias. I chose recent high school graduates in their first year of college because they should be able to recall and reflect on their high school band experiences accurately because of the relatively short time frame following high school graduation.

#### ***Limitations***

Limitations of this study include researcher-induced bias as well as participants' fears and unknown biases. Researcher-induced bias can affect the outcome of this study. I used the tool known as bracketing, as suggested by Moustakas (1994) to prevent this type of bias. When bracketing, "investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). According to Creswell and Poth (2018) bracketing can be challenging because researchers will have assumptions they bring to the topic as the research is conducted and investigated. Some participants were concerned that they could be identified after the research is released and

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wished to withdraw from the study. Further study limitations were unknown biases from their band experience, which would impact their answers to interview questions.

### *Delimitations*

I delimited participants in this study to students formerly enrolled in high school bands in the southeastern states bordering Georgia: Alabama, Florida, South Carolina, and Tennessee. These states added to the scope of the study to prevent researcher bias from only interviewing students of band director colleagues in my home state of Georgia. I interviewed 20 former high school band students selected through criterion sampling. Criteria for this study were students who are current college freshmen and were members of their high school band for four years or dropped out during their time in high school. I entrusted band director colleagues to invite former students who met my study criteria to participate. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested recruiting a minimum of 12 participants for phenomenological research. I selected 20 participants for this study: 10 individuals who completed four years of high school band and 10 who did not. I further delimited the study's participants to young college adults aged 19 or older due to IRB site permission requirements of individual school systems. I delimited my recruiting venue to *Facebook* band director groups for the states I chose. I did not use any other form of social media because I am unaware of any band director-specific groups on other social media platforms.

## Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

### Band in America

#### *The Beginning of Standardized Music Education in America*

Early standardized music education began with singing psalm tunes in church in Colonial America (Mark, 2008). Churchgoers who did not know how to read music would use a process called "lining out" to learn psalms (Mark, 2008). "Each line of a psalm was read by a deacon, or precentor, who gave the starting pitch and led the congregational singing" (Mark, 2008, p. 41). The congregation would repeat what the leader sang to learn the psalms. Using this rote teaching method, the quality of church music declined, and ministers began to advocate for music instruction "to teach their congregations to read music" (Mark, 2008, p. 44). The Reverend John Tufts used his sermons which "disparaged musical illiteracy and he wrote the first American textbook to solve the problem. He was the most significant figure in American music education until the 1820s..." (Mark, 2008, p. 44). Tuft advocated for music education, and his book was the first music book published in America, *An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes*, in 1721 (Mark, 2008). The use of Tuft's book to teach Psalm tunes in singing schools constituted the first method of formal music education in the United States (Feldman et al., 2011; Justus, 2002). The invention of the printing press and standardized notation made the formal study of music in Early America possible (Feldman et al., 2011; Justus, 2002).

Lowell Mason brought public school music instruction to the Boston public schools in America (Feldman et al., 2011). Two books utilized in the Boston public schools for music instruction were the *American Elementary Singing Book* (1830) and *The Juvenile Lyre* (1831) (Feldman et al., 2001). The preface of *The Juvenile Lyre* "was crafted as a weapon in the effort to include music in the Boston Public schools" (Feldman et al., 2011, p. 64). Mark (2008) stated,

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"music would aid the moral, intellectual, and physical development of children" (p. 40). This information was used as an argument to include music instruction in all public schools. In 1838, Boston public schools adopted vocal music as a curricular subject through individual voice lessons (Mark, 2008). The New England Conservatory of Music began the first classroom study of musical instruments, modeling their teaching style after the German Conservatory style (Mark, 2008).

### *The Emergence of the American Wind Band*

The first military wind band in the United States began when President John Adams established the United States Marine Band (USMB) through an Act of Congress in 1798 (Battisti & Duffy, 2018). The band had the following instrumentation, “drum major, fife major, and 32 drums and fifes” (Battisti & Duffy, 2018, p. 6). The first bands in the United States were part of state militias; they were modeled after English bands and played numerous pieces arranged for the English bands of the time (Battisti & Duffy, 2018).

Civic and community bands also played an essential role in the rise in popularity of the American Wind Band. In 1830, the Independent Band of New York was founded (Battisti & Duffy, 2018). The founders of the New York band, the Dodworth family, switched the band to an all-brass band in 1836. Following their lead, numerous bands embraced the same all-brass concept. These groups were prominent before the Civil War in the New England states. In 1853, The American Band of Rhode Island was the first American band to include woodwinds in their instrumentation. The next evolution of the American Wind Band came from the Irish immigrant Patrick Gilmore, who is known as the father of the American concert band. Gilmore expanded the popularity of the American wind band by having numerous large concerts around the United States. He also brought innovation to the band’s instrumentation, “shifting the emphasis from the

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brasses to the woodwinds, especially the clarinets” (Battisti & Duffy, 2018, p. 9).

John Philip Sousa is considered by many to be the greatest bandmaster who ever lived (Battisti & Duffy, 2018). Sousa led the US Marine Band for 12 years and following his tenure with the group, retired and formed his private group, the John Philip Sousa Professional Band. “Sousa's goal was to present band concerts that would entertain people. Entertainment is of more value to the world than technical education in music appreciation” (Battisti & Duffy, 2018, p.10). Sousa's era is known as the golden age for bands. During this time (1880-1925), American band music became the popular form of music of entertainment in the United States. Sousa was best known as the "March King" because he composed his marches, and people would go to his band concerts to enjoy them. His bands also performed other works, such as orchestral transcriptions and new compositions for the wind band, which aided in developing the wind band in the educational setting (Battisti & Duffy, 2018).

Moving forward into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Frederick Fennell (1914-2004) led a critical modernization of the American Wind Band, which has been replicated by numerous performing groups and is commonly known as the wind ensemble (Battisti & Duffy, 2018). Fennell was a faculty member at The Eastman School of Music when he developed the wind ensemble. The concept of the wind ensemble gave performers and collegiate musicians in Fennell's ensemble more opportunities for solo and chamber-style playing because the ensemble had small numbers in each section. Fennell wanted to allow opportunities for composers to write more music for the wind band medium. At the time, the American Bandmasters Association and the College Band Director's Association tried standardizing wind band instrumentation for publishers. At the same time, Fennell believed presenting the wind ensemble concept to publishers would give them a different pallet of sounds with which to work. Fennell wanted composers to be free to write for

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any combination of instruments, and he desired to offer composers a different perspective so they would compose more wind band literature. Fennell used a small number of musicians in each section of the wind ensemble, but this was only to give composers more flexibility. The Eastman Wind Ensemble was the first band recorded on a major record label, Mercury Records. These recordings became reference material for band directors around the world. After hearing these recordings of the Eastman Wind Ensemble, band directors began breaking down their ensembles to imitate Fennell's wind ensemble idea and sound. The wind ensemble became very popular among other college directors and was eventually replicated in high schools when possible (Battisti & Duffy, 2018).

### *The High School Band Tradition*

The 1920s saw a rise in the popularity of the high school band in the United States (Mark, 2008). By this time, professional bands were no longer the most popular form of entertainment. High school bands and college/university bands replaced these professional bands. With the rise of the school band, members of amateur or professional bands became school band leaders. The rise of school bands provided a source of stable employment for these individuals from amateur/professional bands (Mark, 2008).

In 1913, school systems in "Oakland, California, Grand Rapids and Detroit, Michigan, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Cleveland, Ohio, began acquiring instruments to offer instrumental class instruction and developing bands and orchestras" (Battisti & Duffy, 2018, p. 388). The growth of band and orchestra education in the United States remained slow, however, in 1927, the national convention of school superintendents "urged all American schools to place music on a par with the three Rs as one of the fundamentals of education in the country" (Battisti & Duffy 2018, p. 388). In the 1930s, local communities began to enlist school bands to provide

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entertainment for civic events (Battisti & Duffy, 2018). After World War I, instrumental music companies promoted music education in schools to give military bandmen returning from the war employment “as teachers and band directors for school music programs” (Battisti & Duffy, 2018, p. 389). In the 1920s, local, regional, state, and national level band contests were held yearly. These contests were a great source of community pride for many bands; the earliest known winner of the national band contest was the Joliet Township High School Band from Joliet, Illinois. In 1932, the National School Band Association discontinued ranking bands in competitions, opting for a “competitive festival format based on group ratings” (Battisti & Duffy, 2018, p. 390). At the beginning of World War II, the contest movement brought national attention and support for public school music. However, national band competitions were curtailed due to World War II travel restrictions (Battisti & Duffy, 2018).

In the 1940s, the lack of quality school wind band literature became an issue of concern (Battisti & Duffy, 2018). In the 1960s, the Music Educators National Conference (MENC)<sup>1</sup> In partnership with a Ford Foundation grant started the Young Composers in Residence Program. This program placed a composer in a public school system across the United States so they could compose music for public schools. This program aimed to expand the wind band literature for public schools. The Young Composers in Residence Program yielded numerous selections of quality literature written for the public school wind band. New repertoire expanded the popularity of school bands, encouraging more students to join. Through numerous initiatives and programs, NAFME has helped mold public school wind bands into what we know today (Battisti & Duffy, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> Music Educators National Conference (MENC) is now the National Association for Music Education.

### **Educational Philosophies**

#### ***Bennett Reimer***

Public school instrumental music education led to the emergence of two philosophical beliefs about music education from Bennett Reimer and David Elliott (Feldman et al., 2011). Bennett Reimer believed in "absolute expressionism, which holds that the arts are essential and unique in what they offer children, and that musical meaning exists entirely within a work itself, without reference to anything outside of it" (Mark, 2008, p. 152). According to Reimer's approach, music was a tool for expression for students (Feldman et al., 2011; Reimer, 1988). Reimer's philosophy of music cultivated students' aesthetic education. He concluded that music allows students to understand beauty, express themselves, and use their aural abilities to refine music.

#### ***David Elliott***

Elliott's approach involved the action of making music using a different methodical approach to Reimer's. Elliott believed when musicians engaged in making music, they entered a state known as "flow experiences, characterized by the complete absorption and enjoyment that comes from deep concentration" (Mark, 2008, p. 153). The philosophical approach of Elliott, praxial music education, taught students to be reflective in their music-making. Elliott's approach encouraged students to perform and listen, improvise, and listen, compose and listen, and conduct and listen. Praxial music education involves students performing and continually evaluating to perfect their craft (Feldman et al., 2011; Reimer, 1988). Green and Hale (2011) supported a form of praxial music education that fostered lifelong musical involvement in



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school-aged children. The study found that matching student lessons and instructional practices with classroom elements helped foster lifelong learning among the students involved (Green & Hale, 2011). The lessons for the classroom involved removing competition and focusing on challenging tasks, effort, and enjoyment. This allowed students to participate in classroom decisions and supported Elliott’s philosophy (Barry, 2007; Green & Hale, 2011).

### *Flow Theory*

The philosophy of Bennett Reimer taught students that learning music helped one discover the beauty of music and the wonderful experience they can have through performance (Reimer, 1988). Elliott’s philosophy focused on a hands-on approach, specifically through students performing a work, reflecting on their performance, and repeating the process of working towards perfection (Elliott, 2009). Elliott's philosophy closely aligned with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory, which states “that a balance between perceived challenge and skill is necessary for optimal performance experience” (Barry, 2007, p. 25). Flow Theory is thought to provide intrinsic motivation by balancing challenge and discovery in an educational setting (Barry, 2007). Csikszentmihalyi's theory was based on balance; if a student perceived music as easy, they would not be interested. They would be discouraged if the music was too challenging and the appropriate performance skills needed were difficult to develop. So, students can achieve an optimal performance of their music; the music must be challenging enough that it is within their capability, something they can enjoy performing, and something they can work towards perfecting which will increase their intrinsic motivation (Barry, 2007).

### **Benefits of Participating in Band**

#### *Musical Benefits*

In the existing literature, the benefits of music education are generalized for all music

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disciplines and are sometimes specific to band. However, it should be noted that these general benefits can be found in the many different areas of music education: general music, band, orchestra, and choir. Feldman et al. (2011) suggested music instruction has numerous musical and non-musical benefits for students, which developed from the educational philosophies of Bennett Reimer and David Elliott. Students who studied music gained the benefits of what is known as the "big five": rhythmic ability, tonal ability, creativity, reading notation, and performing ability (West, 2015). Students enrolled in the band developed the ability to audiate, which aided in their ability to determine the correctness of their performance (West, 2015).

“When technique and notation are realized through an aural sensitivity to sound, performance is transformed from an act of mechanics to an expression of musicianship” (West, 2015, p. 102). Students who recognized the quality of their performance could make adjustments to improve (Floyd, 2015; West, 2015). Such ear training techniques taught students an aural sensitivity, impacting their overall musicianship and experience in the band (Floyd, 2015). This musical training and skills are not isolated to the band room.

### *Academic Benefits*

Several studies suggested music education has a positive benefit on student academic achievement and social outcomes for music students (Elpus, 2022; Mehr, 2013, 2015). Music programs may initially have high levels of enrollment because it is believed that music will produce favorable academic outcomes for students. Kinney (2019) found students who performed better in school were more likely to be enrolled in a music class. Tucker and Winsler (2023) discovered students transitioning from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade music (band, chorus, guitar, and orchestra) were more academically competent than those that do not. Elpus (2018) linked arts education with a greater possibility of college attendance. Elpus (2022) discovered instrumental

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music students “were significantly more likely to apply to any college than were non-instrumental music students” (p. 417). “Music classes become one of many possible vehicles for adolescents to gain a greater sense of responsibility, broaden various ‘life skills,’ and discover ‘who they are’ before adulthood” (Tucker & Winsler, 2023, p. 24). These academic and non-academic benefits should not be ignored. Students’ parents push music participation because of the hope it will enrich other areas of development such as academic achievement (Costa-Giomi & Chappell, 2007; Winner et al., 2013).

Arts classes also have numerous non-musical benefits which go beyond the notes and rhythms on the page. The non-musical benefits taught students to “share thoughts and feelings without words, express emotions, and music is a universal language” (Lautzenheiser, 2005, p. 7). Students who learned to work together through music performance begin working beyond the notes and rhythms and enjoy the non-musical benefits of being in the band (Fisher & Hamburg, 2021; Floyd, 2015; West, 2015).

### ***Non-Musical Benefits of Band***

Why music? Why band? These were questions posed by Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser (2005) in an essay composed to aid band directors in recruiting and retaining their students and promoting the non-musical benefits of music study. "Unlike teachers of other academic subjects, music educators must recruit and retain their students/musicians" (Lautzenheiser, 2005, p. 3). Lautzenheiser (2005) insisted being in band required mature skills students must develop for years. Students in band have typically been in the top one-third of high achievers in their schools (Lautzenheiser, 2005). Lautzenheiser (2005) insisted the demands on band students' time are vast; however, these students can better navigate their academic and social demands using the learned skills from being in band. He continued that participating in band gives students a refined

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understanding of what they can gain from investing their time and energy into an activity (Lautzenheiser, 2005). Students who studied band gained the non-musical benefits of "teamwork skills, self-discipline, healthy self-esteem, personal confidence, and learning to reach short-term and long-term goals" (Lautzenheiser, 2005, p. 3). Various studies suggested students must understand these non-musical benefits can transfer to their academic classes and real-world experiences (Labuta, 1997; Lautzenheiser, 2005). Dwyer (2011) reported being in music promotes better social and emotional learning and creates greater engagement within the school. Increased engagement within the school increases school persistence toward achieving high school graduation and promotes greater postsecondary aspirations and attainment (Dwyer, 2011; Elpus, 2022).

The goal of learner independence appears in various teaching standards (Floyd, 2015; *INTASC*, 2023; Weidner, 2020). The Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (*INTASC*) “is a resource for ongoing teacher development established by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)” (Ball State University, 2023, n.p.). The *INTASC* (2023) put forth 10 standards for teaching, and Standard 8 reads, "The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to develop a deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways." (n.p.). This standard aims to move students toward learning independence (*INTASC*, 2023). Floyd (2015) stated that teaching students to play a musical instrument encouraged them to become independent thinkers. Students who became independent thinkers through music learning could interpret musical passages independently and appreciate music's aesthetic experience (Floyd, 2015; Floyd, 2021; Labuta, 1997; Reimer, 1988). Students who created or interpreted musical passages without referring to the ensemble conductor developed a sense of

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musical independence (Labuta, 1997; Reimer, 1988).

Weidner (2020) indicated students who think for themselves while playing a musical instrument develop better self-confidence, self-esteem, and critical decision-making skills. These skills helped students make musical decisions about their practice and when performing in an ensemble. Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz (2003) found that students in music ensembles learned time management skills while also learning to take constructive criticism. Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz (2003) also concluded that students valued the positive reinforcement they received and enjoyed the atmosphere of their music class.

### ***Emotional and Social Benefits***

Elpus (2022) said participation in music in school improves students social and emotional learning. Participation in high school and college bands provided an outlet for social interaction (Cumberledge, 2017; Edgar, 2019; Milton, 1982). Students who continued playing their instruments in high school bands developed strong relationships with individuals in their ensembles and gained friendships through shared experiences and understanding (Floyd, 2021; Labuta, 1997; Moder, 2018; Milton, 1982). Multiple studies indicated the band room could also become a haven before and after school for students to congregate and socialize (Floyd, 2021; Labuta, 1997; Moder, 2018). The relationships created in the band room were rich and extended past the classroom, school day, and graduation (Floyd, 2021; Labuta, 1997; Moder, 2018). Students who experienced making music together formed bonds that were difficult to break (Hewitt & Allan, 2013; Floyd, 2021; Fountain & Verrier, 2020). Students who participated in college marching band also did so because they had fond memories of their high school band experience; they felt they formed familial bonds with their peers in their high school band (Alosi, 2015; Milton, 1982). Students who formed bonds together had the potential to remain together

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through college and well into their adult years (Hewitt & Allan, 2013; Edgar, 2019; Milton, 1982).

### **Motivation Theories**

Music Educators have worked to discover what motivates their students to perform their best. Numerous theories of motivation exist and have been applied in the music education setting. Two early theories of motivation were from William James and Sigmund Freud, and the theories were similar (Werpy, 1995). Both stated we are motivated to do something because of an implied stimulus. Therefore, individuals do not think; they react. Behavior theorists, such as Skinner, believed behaviors occurred because of the environment and stopped only when punished. Werpy (1995) concluded that behaviorists are concerned with what environmental triggers will reinforce positive behavior or what negative actions are needed to cease it.

Lewin developed Expectancy-Value Theory (Werpy, 1995). This theory stated motivation depended on an individual's aspirations for success. People base their aspirations on past successes and failures, higher aspirations stem from past achievements, and lower aspirations stem from past failures. According to the theory, the expectancy of success was individualistic; individuals were motivated by positive and negative attributes they have for success or failure. A separate theory, Attribution Theory, stated the search for understanding was the basis for motivation. A person will succeed or fail at a task and will be curious as to why they achieved said results. Atkinson proposed achievement motivation, stating that high achievers were likely intrinsically motivated, enjoyed learning, and worked to master a task of increasing difficulty. Both Attribution Theory and Achievement Motivation are directly applicable to musical experiences. Werpy (1995) suggested that musicians who seek success will strive for achievement, while musicians who fear failure will avoid threats to their self-esteem.

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The argument can be made that the previously stated theories of motivation can be applied to the experiences students have through their involvement in music education. However, Attribution Theory and Achievement Motivation have direct links to intrinsic motivation (Werpy, 1995). "Theories of intrinsic motivation are based on the premise that motivation arises from deep psychological needs for self-determination and interpersonal relatedness" (Werpy, 1995, p. 33). Flow theory and Self-Report measures are directly related to intrinsic motivation. Flow Theory by Csikszentmihalyi stated motivation comes from action, not a product. Intrinsic motivation was the natural result of performing an activity that appropriately challenged an individual's skill level. The final theory, Self-Report measures, stated that activities will reveal an individual's interest or willingness to invest energy, which indicates motivation. If an individual found an activity interesting, they devoted their time, energy, and resources to their performance (Werpy, 1995). Attribution Theory, Achievement Motivation, Flow Theory, and Self-Report Theory are directly linked to intrinsic motivation. However, Flow Theory and Self-Report Theory are related to physical stimulants, while Attribution Theory and Achievement Motivation are related to internal stimulants.

Developing a student's intrinsic motivation increases a student's likelihood of remaining in band (Moder, 2018). Barry (2007) stated intrinsic motivation "describes the personal enjoyment and satisfaction a student derives from music making" (p. 24). Moder (2018) suggested that helping students develop intrinsic motivation assisted them in becoming lifelong learners of music. Moder (2018) concluded that teaching students to become lifelong music learners is challenging; however, it can be accomplished if students enjoy performing on their instruments in their middle and high school ensembles. Albert (2006) insisted if directors empowered students to take command of their learning, student retention, and recruitment would advance

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faster. Students who were empowered to be in band continued to learn at all ages throughout middle school, high school, and college band (Albert, 2006). Students who participated in the band developed intrinsic motivation while receiving support from friends and family to become lifelong learners.

### *Family*

The role in which their family plays dramatically impacts a student's musical experience. Elpus and Grise (2019) stated students saw their parents' active role in their musical lives and were encouraged by their support. A student's family also influenced their success in the academic and fine arts classroom (Stinson, 2021). Stinson (2021) suggested family influence affected student instrument selection, promoted academic success, influenced peer groups, and guided student interests. Stinson (2021) continued that parents of all economic and religious backgrounds have worked to do what is best for their students participating in band. Students from homes where a parent grew up as a member of a band program had a substantial likelihood of participating in band (McMahon, 2008; Moyer, 2010; Stinson, 2021). Studies indicated students often participated in the same activities their parents did in school because of the familiarity, comfort, and closeness they felt with their parents (McMahon, 2008; Moyer, 2010; Stinson, 2021). Students who chose to continue in an activity their parents did when they were in school created a deeper bond with their parents, especially if they experienced enjoyment in doing the activity (Moyer, 2010; Stinson, 2021). Additionally, children whose parents were in a band program were more likely to purchase a band instrument (Isbell, 2011; Moyer, 2010).

Families who purchased instruments for their children became financially invested; therefore, their children were more likely to continue in band because of their instrument purchase (Isbell, 2011; Moyer, 2010). This financial commitment impacted student motivation



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and made students feel connected to the band program. Student friendships and financial commitment also impacted student motivation for continued participation in band; however, to reap the full benefits of participating in a performing ensemble required individual motivation (Isbell, 2011; Moyer, 2010).

### *Ensemble Leadership*

Successful band programs exhibit "...quality leadership, quality music performance, a tradition of excellence, a good feeder system, sufficient funding, community/school support, 'fun' programs, good program management, and good concert programs" (Gouzouasis et al., 2008, p. 76). Jellison (2000) stated music educators view the importance of a quality school music program to the quality of musical life. Werpy (1995) argued a successful band program begins with effective leadership. A quality leader planned for rehearsals, student behavior, and any other situation an ensemble may encounter (Garofalo, 1983; Werpy, 1995). Leaders with a definitive plan created an atmosphere of success that instilled a tradition of excellence in their ensemble (Garofalo, 1983). Philips (2016) added that an effective leader is not afraid to seek input from students about the aspects of the program they do or do not enjoy. Strong leaders also sought peer input and continually strived to learn more effective ways to communicate material and lessons to their students (Garofalo, 1983; Philips, 2016).

Teachers who adapted their teaching philosophy to their students' interests tended to retain students each academic year (Andrade, 1997; Hayes, 2004; Jolly, 2008). Interest referred to the "personal intrinsic motivation the individual has for the task or domain, often defined in terms of how much he enjoys or likes to do activities related to the task or domain" (Colwell & Webster, 2011, p. 231). Andrade (1997) said a director should gear their program and teaching philosophies so students can enjoy their learning. Directors who connected their educational

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content in an exciting way to their students’ culture and interests had a better chance of motivating and retaining students in their program (Andrade, 1997; Hayes, 2004; Jolly, 2008).

"If individuals have very little knowledge of an activity or topic, then it is hard for them to judge their interest in it" (Colwell & Webster, 2011, p. 246). Multiple studies suggested that students must clearly understand a band program's musical and organizational goals to develop intrinsic motivation (Andrade, 1997; Colwell & Webster, 2011; Hayes, 2004; Jolly, 2008). "In order for the director and the students both to be happy with a band program, they must coexist with the same goals and philosophies" (Andrade, 1997, p. 3). Students whose educational needs and interests were met through adaptive leadership were likelier to develop their intrinsic motivation and continue in band (Albert, 2006; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Hayes, 2004).

Music educators have constantly adapted and learned better ways to teach concepts, listened to new literature, and collaborated to find better methods to implement the curriculum in their programs (Garofalo, 1983; Philips, 2016; Standerfer, 2011). Directors who continually assessed their students were able to adjust their curriculum and performance goals to meet their ensemble needs (Garofalo, 1983; Philips, 2016; Standerfer, 2011). Quality leaders were also unafraid of negative feedback they may receive from students, peers, or trusted mentors. Any feedback associated with an aspect of a class or organization should be used or adapted to better mold student instruction. Sometimes the feedback was not about instruction; it was about classroom procedures, discipline, and ways to achieve better results (Garofalo, 1983; Philips, 2016; Standerfer, 2011). Multiple studies indicated that communication seeking criticism is uncomfortable but can be a helpful means of adjusting the class and organization's methods (Garofalo, 1983; Phillips, 2016; Standerfer, 2011).

Studies have suggested an effective leader is a strong communicator (Garofalo, 1983;

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Moss, 2020; Phillips, 2016). Garofalo (1983) argued that a quality ensemble leader motivated the students and their parents to produce their best products. Similarly, Phillips (2016) revealed an effective ensemble leader advocated for their program with school administration, community leaders, and younger students in terms of recruitment into the program. Also, a quality leader talked to students considering not continuing in the program to find out why they were leaving (Hagner, 1985; Moss, 2020; Phillips, 2016). Possible reasons for leaving the program included issues the teacher and student could discuss or something the teacher could prevent in the future (Brakel, 1997; Jackson & McLaney, 2010; Phillips, 2016). Ensemble directors who communicated with their students formed bonds with their students. This communication encouraged students to do the same with each other, which created a family environment within the ensemble (Edgar, 2019). "Music programs can often start to feel like mini families. This occurs when something truly special is happening on a social and emotional level" (Edgar, 2019, p. 131). High energy, positivity, and knowledgeable leaders strongly influence a student's reason for continuing in band or any performing ensemble (Elpus & Abril, 2011). Directors can also review retention from high school to college bands to inform their recruitment strategies (Brakel, 1997; Elpus & Abril, 2011). Whitten (2015) surveyed college band directors in Kansas and Missouri to discover what they believed to be essential recruitment components. The most crucial factor was the relationship with and personality of the ensemble director. Finally, an effective leader recruited students and their parents into their ensemble (Garofalo, 1983; Jackson & McLaney, 2010; Nierman & Veak, 1997; Phillips, 2016).

Bands can only function with parents willing to sacrifice their time and money to ensure their children succeed. Parent volunteers' willingness to run the concession stand, chaperone a trip, or assist with equipment impacts the success of band programs. Directors who educate and

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recruit parent volunteers ensure the continued success of their programs (Garofalo, 1983; Jackson & McLaney, 2010; Phillips, 2016).

### *Student Perception*

Student perception of themselves is directly tied to student motivation to participate and remain in band (Nierman & Veak, 1997; Robinson, 1997). Students who viewed their band experience as positive and their peers enjoyed band as well were more likely to persist in band (Nierman & Veak, 1997; Robinson, 1997). Similarly, Stewart (2005) argued students who liked participating in band, found band exciting and valuable and enjoyed performing for events were more likely to continue in band and become lifelong musicians. Stewart (2007) found that friendships, performances, and high school band reputation were solid motivators for students to continue in band because these aspects made the band experience positive. West (2015) indicated high-performing students continually sought motivators for improvement and enjoyable participation in band programs.

Lovgren (1996) and Moder (2018) found that students viewed positive band experiences as gratifying long past their time in the ensemble. A positive band experience was not always measured by the applause of an audience; it was also measured by the successful completion of a playing test or ensemble assessments (Albert, 2006; Conway, 2015; Klinedinst, 1991; McClarty, 1970). Multiple studies reported that students who enjoyed band experiences understood the necessity of assessments because the evaluations provided goals for students and ensembles to work toward (Albert, 2006; Robinson, 1997; Stewart, 2005). Additionally, completing performance assessments gave students strong musical self-confidence (McClarty, 1970; Klinedinst, 1991; Robinson, 1997). Proponents stated music assessments provided a positive motivational arena for students and helped elevate performance standards beyond what was

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achieved daily (Gomes, 1983; Gouzouasis & Henderson, 2012).

Additionally, studies indicated directors, students, and parents were motivated by outstanding performances and ratings (Bauer, 1983; Gouzouasis & Henderson, 2012; Hutchinson, 1983; Mills, 1988). Because students were motivated to receive good ratings and give outstanding performances, they practiced more, enthusiastically encouraged each other, and were likelier to work on minute details (Gomes, 1983; Gouzouasis & Henderson, 2012). Furthermore, the group effort required to succeed at band contests built camaraderie and a feeling of family (Bauer, 1983; Gouzouasis & Henderson, 2012; Mills, 1988). By contrast, some band directors found the achievement of student and ensemble goals to be more important than winning or achieving a particular rating (Ramsey, 1989). Furthermore, Werpy (1995) found band competitions to benefit program enrollment and student self-confidence positively. Musical self-confidence aids in student continuation in the high school band (Werpy, 1995). Students confident in their playing ability were more likely to enjoy playing their instrument and continue to perform in the future (McClarty, 1970; Mills, 1988).

### **Reasons Students Leave**

Sometimes the success of a band program or a director's accommodations for student needs and schedules do not matter (Hagner, 1985). Some students are still going to drop out of band. In studies regarding student persistence in middle school band, middle school band directors cited “lack of commitment to work” as the common reason students dropped out (Boyle et al., 1995; Ng & Hartwig, 2011). Middle school students questioned about their peers leaving band said that their friends “make a conscious effort to avoid music” (Tucker & Winsler, 2023). Scholars found other students left music classes for “weighted” courses such as honor or advanced placement (AP) classes (Baker, 2009). Baker (2009) found that course conflicts and increasing pressure to

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take heavily weighted classes were a common reason students did not continue music in high school. Other students stated that their music program was poor quality, and that is why they decided to leave (Tucker & Winsler, 2023).

Directors should work to understand the reasons students will leave and have possible strategies to aid them in making their decision. “Notably, the experience within each music classroom should first and foremost be catered toward fostering a love and appreciation for music, not just, for example, proficiency in one’s major scales” (Tucker & Winsler, 2023, p. 41). Band directors should work to achieve a positive experience for all students in band so they will want to continue to enroll in band in future years (Tucker & Winsler, 2023). If a student wants to leave, a director should have a conference with that student about dropping band. Issues raised by students about dropping included the music being too demanding, lack of progression on their instrument, the music being too easy, the student being unhappy with their instrument of choice or wishing to change, and the student missing other activities because of the band (Hagner, 1985). These problems can be solved if the student and band director are willing to cooperate and work toward a resolution (Hagner, 1985).

### ***Burnout***

Student burnout in high school bands was not addressed in conventional music literature; however, comparisons can be made with the literature reporting on teacher, music teacher, and general student body burnout was found. High school and college non-band student reasons for burnout were similar. Bernhard (2005) stated burnout “has three distinct measurable components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment” (n.p.). Teacher and high school student burnout are well documented (Bernhard, 2005; Walburg, 2014). Similar to teacher burnout, student burnout has consequences for students' academic, professional, and

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personal health. Burnout in high school students was found “with different school organizations and academic policies” (Walburg, 2014, p. 30). Burnout in high school students also led to lower school engagement and achievement and was more prevalent in students on intense academic tracks than those in vocational or trade school tracks (Walburg, 2014). It also affected students’ academic performance and mental health (Walburg, 2014).

### **Need for Study**

The educational philosophies of Reimer and Elliott promote music's positive effects on students. Students who learned a musical instrument and participated in a music ensemble experienced the benefits of friendships and a positive environment for self-expression. Ensemble participants who enjoyed being in band, found it exciting, and engaged in performing were likelier to stay in band. Students who participated in competitions and experienced outstanding performances while achieving high ratings were highly motivated to remain in band. Ensemble members who performed quality literature, understood ensemble goals, and had an energetic instructor were likelier to enjoy performing in a musical ensemble. Students need to be a part of a performing ensemble to gain the musical and non-musical benefits of participation. However, the question remains as to why some students stay in band and why others drop out before they complete high school. This study explores why students chose to remain enrolled in the high school band for four years or decided to drop out.

## **Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures**

### **Methodology**

This is a phenomenological study of first-year college students' lived experiences related to their decision to remain in four years of high school band or drop out. “Phenomenology is not only a description, but it is also an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78). Phenomenological research involves developing a textural and structural description of participants lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The first section of this chapter provides a rationale for qualitative research that best fits this study. The second section describes the recruitment process and selection criteria for participants. The third section explains how interview data were collected from the participants and how the interview protocol was developed. The final section presents the data analysis process.

### **Rationale**

Qualitative research is for “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2014, p. 32). Qualitative research uses observation to gain knowledge, achieve understanding, and answer research questions (Mertler, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover why students chose to remain in high school band for four years or drop out before they finished high school. Qualitative research focuses on description, opinions, and experiences instead of numerical statistics. This study is about describing and understanding the lived experiences of a set group of band students from the Southeastern United States, specifically the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina,



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and Tennessee.

Qualitative research seeks to understand the human experience (Frost, 2022). Qualitative research examines subjects in their natural environment and how they experience those environments. Five qualitative research methods exist: ethnography, narrative research, grounded theory, case study, and phenomenology (Frost, 2022). The phenomenological approach was deemed most appropriate for this study because it attempts to describe participants lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenology helps researchers understand lived experiences (Peoples, 2021). According to Creswell and Poth (2018) the researcher collects data from the participants who have experienced the phenomenon by recording in-depth interviews. Following the interviews, the recordings are transcribed into a written format. The transcripts are then analyzed for concept codes. Concept codes are essential words or phrases found in the interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2021). “The researcher then analyzes the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes” (Creswell, 2018, p.78). Combining the concepts codes to significant statements or themes is also known as phenomenological reduction (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Next, the researcher develops a textual description of participants' experiences and uses this to determine the overall essence of the experience. The essence defines the underlying common experience associated with all individuals who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I aimed to determine why high school band students choose to remain in high school band or drop out. Phenomenology allowed me to reconstruct the participant's experiences, develop themes, and discover the overarching essence of their experiences in high school band.

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### **Participants**

The process for recruiting participants began once necessary approvals were obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Auburn University. Social media, specifically *Facebook*, was used to invite band directors in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee to assist with recruiting participants (See Appendix B). The states were chosen because of my familiarity with their curricular and performance standards. If a band director chose to assist with the study, they were directed to send a private message through the social media platform, *Facebook*. I responded with an electronic recruitment letter, an email that briefly described my study. Upon agreeing to participate, directors were asked to distribute the recruitment letter to former band students who completed four years of high school band and were enrolled in their first year of college (See Appendix C). Similarly, directors were asked to send the letter to students who did not complete four years of high school band and were in their first year of college. The invitation included my email and phone number so interested participants could contact me for more information. Individuals responding to the email invitation who expressed interest in participating received an information letter via email (Appendix D).

I chose to use 20 participants for the two aspects of this research: 10 individuals who completed four years of high school band and 10 who did not. Guidelines set forth by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) protected participants during the interview process. I worked in a home office with the door locked to ensure privacy. Before the interviews began, it was recommended that interviewees do the same to maintain the same level of privacy. Numbers were used to de-identify the names of individuals and letters for institutions to protect the interviewees' confidentiality. Participants who stayed in band were randomly given a number from 1 to 10, and

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participants who dropped band were given a number randomly from 11 to 20. There was no other association given to the numbers for participants other than grouping them by those who dropped band and those who stayed in band.

### **Data Collection**

An interview protocol consisting of 15 open-ended questions was constructed to obtain a textual description of participants’ lived experiences (See Appendix E). These questions do not provide participants with a predetermined set of answer choices, instead allowing them to respond in their own words (Albudaiwi, n.d.). I aimed to reconstruct the participants’ lived experiences and find the meaning in those experiences (Seidman, 2019). The review of related literature informed the development of questions for the interview protocol. The interview protocol was written to discover answers to the four research questions guiding the study. The four research questions are:

1. What motivated participants to join band?
2. What challenges or barriers did participants encounter to remaining in band?
3. What supports or encouragements did participants encounter to remain in band?
4. How do participants describe their decision to remain in their band program for four years or drop band during high school?

The instrument development table represents the association between the related literature and research questions, and the association between interview questions and research questions. Although not piloted, the study used peer review to validate the interview protocol and instrument development table.

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**Table 1: Instrument Development Table**

*Table 1: Instrument Development Table. Research question, data collection, and analysis chart*

Research Question	Associated Interview/Survey Items	Data Analysis Procedures	Notes
<b>Phase I: Semi-Structured Interviews</b>			
RQ1: What motivated the participant students to join band?	<p>1. What motivated you to join band?</p> <p>2. Describe how you began on your band instrument in Middle School or High School?</p> <p>-When and how did you first learn to play a band instrument?</p> <p>7. Did you have friends who decided to not join high school band after middle school band?</p> <p>-What do you think influenced their decision to not join high school band? Please explain.</p> <p>10. What advice would you give band directors to help them retain students who are considering</p>	<p>-I transcribed all interviews, observations, documents, journal entries, and field notes into a Microsoft <i>Word</i> Document. I used <i>ATLAS.ti 22</i> software, a qualitative data management and analysis program, to discover concept codes from the interview transcripts.</p> <p>-Themes were found from the concept codes following a Phenomenological Reduction of the concept codes.</p>	<p>- Understanding student motivation as a part of retaining students from middle to high school band is a major concern for band directors as they work to maintain and grow their band rosters of very busy students. High school band students are encouraged to take advanced or AP courses, which leaves little time for a fine arts education and participation in band (Gouzouasis, Henrey, Belliveau, 2008).</p> <p>- Positive band experiences for students are gratifying long past their time in the ensemble (Moder, 2018).</p> <p>- A band program must have students willing to sacrifice their time and effort (Andrade, 1997).</p> <p>- Participation in band in high school and college provides an outlet for social interaction and self-expression (Cumberledge, 2017).</p>

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	<p>leaving high school band?</p> <p>13. Did your peers continue in college band? Are their reasons similar? Please explain.</p> <p>-If they chose to not continue in college band, did they mention what their reasons were?</p>		
<p>RQ2: What challenges or barriers did participant students encounter to remain in band?</p>	<p>3. Tell me how you were placed on your first band instrument?</p> <p>-Was this instrument your first choice or were other factors involved? Please explain.</p> <p>-Are you still on the instrument that you started? If you changed instruments, please explain.</p> <p>5. How do you think your beginning band experience influenced your</p>	<p>-I transcribed all interviews, observations, documents, journal entries, and field notes into a Microsoft <i>Word</i> Document. I used <i>ATLAS.ti 22</i> software, a qualitative data management and analysis program, to discover concept codes from the interview transcripts.</p> <p>-Themes were found from the concept codes following a Phenomenological Reduction of the concept codes.</p>	<p>-Teaching students to become lifelong music learners is challenging, however it can be accomplished if they enjoy performing on their instruments in middle school and high school (Moder, 2018).</p> <p>- It is impressive to see band students of all ages manage the intense daily, weekly, and monthly demands as they prepare for their upcoming performances (Peer Review Comment).</p> <p>- However, it is difficult to remain dedicated in a performing ensemble if a student’s family is not supportive of their endeavors (Peer Review Comment).</p>

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	<p>musical decisions in high school?</p> <p>12. Describe your reasons for continuing in College Band?</p> <p>-If you did not continue in college band, what were your reasons for this decision?</p>		
<p>RQ3: What supports or encouragements did participant students encounter to remain in band?</p>	<p>4. How would you describe your beginning band experiences? In answering this question, you can focus on the people, the families, the organizations, or anything else that stands out to you the most when you think about this experience.</p> <p>8. Describe your family support regarding your decision to be in high school band?</p> <p>11. What advice would you give high school</p>	<p>-I transcribed all interviews, observations, documents, journal entries, and field notes into a Microsoft <i>Word</i> Document. I used <i>ATLAS.ti 22</i> software, a qualitative data management and analysis program, to discover concept codes from the interview transcripts.</p> <p>-Themes were found from the concept codes following a Phenomenological Reduction of the concept codes.</p>	<p>-Stewart (2007) found that friendships, performances, and high school band reputation were strong motivators for students to continue in band because these aspects made the band experience positive.</p> <p>-High performing students were continually looking for motivators for continual improvement and enjoyable participation in band programs (West, 2015).</p> <p>-Barry (2007) stated intrinsic motivation “describes the personal enjoyment and satisfaction a student derives from music making” (p. 24).</p> <p>-Albert (2006) insisted if directors empowered students to take command of their learning, student retention, and recruitment will advance faster.</p>

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	<p>students contemplating not staying in high school band for four years?</p> <p>14. Would you like to mention anything about your high school band experience that you feel may be beneficial in assisting band directors with retention of their students?</p>		
<p>RQ4: How do the participants describe their decision to remain in their band program for four years or drop band during high school?</p>	<p>6. Following your first year of high school band can you describe why you chose to remain in high school band?</p> <p>-If you dropped out of high school band after your first year, please explain your decision to drop out.</p> <p>9. You mentioned that you finished four years of high school band. Describe your reasons for doing so?</p> <p>-If you dropped out of high school</p>	<p>-I transcribed all interviews, observations, documents, journal entries, and field notes into a Microsoft <i>Word</i> Document. I used <i>ATLAS.ti 22</i> software, a qualitative data management and analysis program, to discover concept codes from the interview transcripts.</p> <p>-Themes were found from the concept codes following a Phenomenological Reduction of the concept codes.</p>	<p>-Albert (2006) insisted if directors empowered students to take command of their learning, student retention, and recruitment will advance faster.</p> <p>-Teachers who adapted their teaching philosophy to their students’ interests were more likely to retain students each academic year (Andrade, 1997; Hayes, 2004).</p> <p>-Directors who connected their education content in an exciting way to their students’ culture and interests had a better chance of motivating and retaining students in their program (Andrade, 1997; Hayes, 2004).</p> <p>-Stewart (2005) argued students who liked participating in band, found band exciting and valuable, and enjoyed performing for events</p>

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	band after your first year, can you tell me how you made your decision to do so?  15. Do you have anything that may be beneficial in helping students decide as to whether they should continue in high school or college band?		were more likely to stay in band and become lifelong musicians.
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### Interview Process

Once consent was received from the potential interview participant, they were contacted via email, phone call, or text message to schedule a convenient time to conduct the interview using *Zoom* online video meeting software. *Zoom* audio capabilities were required to be turned on during the interviews; however, *Zoom* video use was optional and could be turned off at any time (See Appendix A).

The interview began by confirming that the participant had received the IRB information letter and they were allowed to ask any questions they had at that time. I then asked for their consent to participate in the interviews and explained that the data would be de-identified and numbers were used to protect their privacy. Participants could decline to answer any questions with which they were uncomfortable and could decide to stop and not participate at any time before, during, or after the interview. If a participant chose not to participate during or after the interview, all information received before they withdrew was destroyed (See Appendix D). Each



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participant was asked 15 questions, and their responses were digitally recorded. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. After the interviews, the digital recordings of the were uploaded into Microsoft *Word* for transcription. Microsoft Word *A.I.* was used to make the initial transcriptions of the interview recordings. I went through the interview transcriptions once completed to ensure accuracy. Following the development of the interview transcriptions, an additional 45 minutes was allowed for the participant to review the transcript and ask questions, also known as member checking. Each interview participant's time commitment was approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes.

During the interviews, I served as a moderator to ensure participants stayed within the interview questions in their responses. I engaged in memoing during the interview to bracket my potential bias and to take notes during the interview. The digital recordings from the interviews were stored in a locked location in my home when not in use.

### **Data Analysis**

All recorded interviews were transcribed into individual Microsoft *Word* Documents. Microsoft *Word* has a feature which transcribes digital recordings. I used this Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) to aid in the development and production of the interview transcripts. After Microsoft Word A.I. completed the interview transcripts, I reviewed them to insure they were coherent, in logical order, and had no spelling or grammar errors. Each interview transcript was then sent to be reviewed by the interview participants, also known as member checking.

*ATLAS.ti 22* software, a qualitative data management and analysis program, was used to discover concept codes and thematic patterns from the interview transcripts. Each interview transcript was reviewed line by line and coded to obtain concept codes. Concept codes are essential words or phrases in the interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2021). I engaged in memoing

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during the interviews to aid in data analysis. During this time, the implementation of bracketing allowed me to set aside personal experiences as much as possible to have a non-biased perspective toward the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Following transcript coding, the process of creating a phenomenological reduction was completed where codes were used to develop themes for each research question (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Themes are “significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). Finally, the emergent themes from this work reported the "common experiences of the participants" and provided the overarching "essence" of this phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 80). The essence is the underlying common experience associated with all individuals who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Validity and Reliability**

#### ***Trustworthiness***

Trustworthiness is "the quality of an investigation and its findings that made it noteworthy to audiences" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 308). Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four criteria to determine the trustworthiness of a qualitative study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Schwandt, 2015). Trustworthiness is vital to qualitative research to meet academic rigor by fulfilling these four criteria (Schwandt, 2015).

#### ***Credibility.***

Credibility is defined as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might

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otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308).

Researcher reflexivity, thick, detailed description, member checking, and peer review established credibility. "Credibility addressed the issue of the inquirer providing assurances of the fit between respondents' views of their lifeways and the inquirer's reconstruction and representation of the same" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 309). A thick, rich description was achieved by presenting the participants' voices under each theme and providing a detailed interview description through transcription. Interviewees could review the interview transcripts, and member checking helped ensure accuracy (Creswell, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that member checks were the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. Member checking involved participants reviewing transcripts and asking questions of the researcher so that the researcher can best reconstruct the realities of the participants (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested using peer debriefing to determine credibility. The researcher's committee and trusted colleagues reviewed interview transcripts and recurring themes to provide peer debriefing. This peer review allowed the Doctoral committee and trusted colleagues to check the work to ensure it was accurate and unbiased (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer review also allowed individuals to make suggestions for areas of improvement or adjustments as needed (Creswell, 2014).

### ***Transferability.***

Transferability refers to "the research findings as applicable to other contexts" (Moran, 2021, para. 3). Other contexts also means similar situations, populations, or phenomena. A thick, rich description shows that research findings apply to other contexts, circumstances, and situations (Moran, 2021). Transferability is achieved through thick, rich description of the participants experiences, honestly describing their experiences without researcher bias. Lincoln

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and Guba (1985) defined thick, rich description as “everything that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings...”(p. 125).

### ***Dependability.***

Schwandt (2015) defined dependability as "the inquirer's responsibility for ensuring that the process was logical, traceable, and documented" (p. 309). If another person wished to replicate this study and obtain similar findings, they could do so because this study used peer review. Peer review is defined as an outside, unbiased group of individuals who ensure that the work of this study is accurate and unbiased (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested an inquiry audit as a method for determining dependability. An inquiry audit was not performed because it is very similar to the peer review process that was used.

### ***Confirmability.***

Moran (2021) defined confirmability as the “degree of neutrality in the research study’s findings...this means that the findings are based on participants’ responses and not any potential bias or personal motivation of the researcher” (para. 4). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the main technique for determining confirmability is inquiry audit, triangulation, and reflexive journaling. Confirmability was accomplished in this study by way of peer review and memoing.

### **Summary**

Phenomenology was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of first-year college students' decision to remain in four years of high school band or drop out. Participants were selected using criterion sampling. First-year college students were interviewed because they had just graduated and could more readily recall their experiences. Each participant answered 15 tailored interview questions, which were recorded and transcribed. Participant

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interview transcripts were reviewed line by line for concept codes. Concept codes were grouped using phenomenological reduction to form themes. The emerging themes from this work reported the "common experiences of the participants" and provided the overarching "essence" of this phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 80).

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover why students chose to remain in high school band for four years or leave before they finished high school. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What motivated participants to join band?
2. What challenges or barriers did participants encounter to remaining in band?
3. What supports or encouragements did participants encounter to remain in band?
4. How do the participants describe their decision to remain in their band program for four years or drop band during high school?

This chapter briefly describes details about the 20 interview participants and reports findings from the data gathered during the 15 in-depth, semi-structured interview questions. I completed data analysis using Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommended methods of phenomenological data analysis. In Chapter 4, I will summarize the themes and introduce the essence, which I will discuss in further detail in Chapter 5.

### Participant Demographics

This section describes the 20 participants regarding their gender, state of residency, and musical instruments. Ten participants shared their reasons for remaining in band throughout high school. Ten participants shared their reasons for dropping band before their high school experience ended. Out of the 20 participants, 11 were male, and nine were female. Reported states of residence were as follows: Alabama ( $n = 4$ ), Florida ( $n = 4$ ), Georgia ( $n = 4$ ), South Carolina ( $n = 4$ ), and Tennessee ( $n = 4$ ). Participants each reported their primary music

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instrument, and they were as follows: flute ( $n = 3$ ), clarinet ( $n = 1$ ), trumpet ( $n = 2$ ), french horn ( $n = 4$ ), trombone ( $n = 5$ ), and percussion ( $n = 5$ ). I did not gather ethnicity for each participant because participants requested to keep their cameras off during the interviews. All students interviewed for both groups met the requirements of the study outlined in chapter three. Table 2 lists all demographic information collected from participants. Information regarding participants race was not collected because it was not a part of the research questions.

**Table 2: Participant Demographic Information**

*Interview Participant Demographic Information*

Participant	Gender	State of Residence	Instrument
P1	Male	Georgia	Trombone
P2	Male	Tennessee	Percussion
P3	Male	Georgia	Trombone
P4	Female	Alabama	Percussion
P5	Male	Florida	Percussion
P6	Male	Florida	Trombone
P7	Male	Tennessee	French Horn
P8	Male	South Carolina	French Horn
P9	Female	South Carolina	French Horn
P11	Male	Georgia	Trumpet
P12	Female	Georgia	Flute
P13	Female	Florida	Clarinet
P14	Female	Tennessee	French Horn
P16	Male	Alabama	Trombone
P17	Male	Florida	Percussion
P18	Female	Alabama	Flute

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Participant	Gender	State of Residence	Instrument
P19	Female	South Carolina	Trombone
P20	Female	South Carolina	Trumpet

### **Unanticipated Occurrences**

An unanticipated occurrence during data collection involved three individuals electing to withdraw from the interview study after they completed their interview. These individuals did not give a reason for their withdrawal. Two of these individuals dropped band before graduating high school, and the other remained in band their entire time in high school. In compliance with the participant rights described in the Information Letter and Auburn University approved IRB protocol and the rules governing this study, I destroyed their audio recordings and removed all interview information from the database and memo journal per their wishes.

Because these individuals withdrew their participation from this study post-interview, I sought out additional interview participants to meet the requirements of the study. In order to find additional interview participants, I asked individuals who volunteered to participate, but were turned away because their information was received after others were selected to participate that fit the required criteria. All individuals contacted to be participants agreed to participate. All Auburn IRB protocol rules and procedures were followed with these individuals.

### **Findings**

I began coding by reading the interview transcripts line by line, then formulated concept codes drawn from essential words and phrases in the interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2021). Using bracketing during the coding process allowed me to set aside personal experiences as much as possible, providing a less-biased perspective toward the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After coding the interview transcripts, I created a phenomenological



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reduction using the codes to develop themes for each research question (Moustakas, 1994). I found the following four themes aligned with each research question:

1. Research Question 1 (RQ1): Motivation
2. Research Question 2 (RQ2): Overall Experience
3. Research Question 3 (RQ3): Relationships
4. Research Question 4 (RQ4): Uncertainty

All interview participants expressed motivation to join band (RQ1). The concept codes of interest, family and friends, instrument choice, and love of music motivated students to join band. Despite encountering challenges, all participants stated they remained in band because of their overall experience (RQ2). The concept codes of both potential for regret and time management influenced each participant's overall band experience. As they spoke of their lived experience in band, participants discussed the relationships they developed with their peers and director (RQ3). The concept codes of positive experience, band director connection, community, and family support, provided the theme relationships for research question 3. Finally, I found the theme of uncertainty from the phenomenological reduction of concept codes for research question 4. The concept codes of enjoyment, friendships, opportunities, conflicting organizations, friend influence, stress, and time supported this theme.

The encompassing idea of the previously stated themes was *priorities*, specifically the emphasis one puts on their *priorities*. I attributed *priorities* and their role in student decision-making to whether or not participants chose to remain in band for the duration of high school. The experience students had in their band programs was also a determining factor in their decision to remain in band or not during their time in high school. The meaning of *priority* related to this phenomenon aligned with the commonly accepted definition: "something given or

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meriting attention before competing alternatives" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The emphasis on *priorities* resonated across all four themes and is discussed in the fifth chapter of this dissertation because it is the essence of this phenomenon.

### ***RQ1: Motivation***

All participants stated they joined band because they were motivated to join, either externally or internally. Participant motivation was initially cultivated or nurtured by their interest, family and friends, instrument choice, and love of music. Participants gave specific reasons for joining the band, but responses centered around personal motivation.

**Interest.** Participants initially expressed interest in band as an activity to join when entering middle school. Participant 7 was motivated to join band at an early age so they could continue band in high school. "So, me and a lot of my friends were doing band, and I saw the high school band. I was like [thought] that's something I really wanna do." These individuals joined band because of an expressed internal motivation that cultivated their interest.

Other participants reported their interest stemmed from their enjoyment of joining the band. Participants 15 and 18 were interested in band because of prior experience with musical instruments. Participant 15 stated, "I started playing drums before joining band when I was five years old." Participant 18 said, "I've played piano, so I had a pretty good knowledge of music and how to read the treble clef, bass clef, and just anything like that." Participant 13 also had a background in playing percussion which impacted their interest in joining the band.

So, I had always loved the drums when I was little. I always wanted a little drum kit, and we had a piano as well at home. I would always play around on the piano, and before I joined band, I'd had a keyboard, so I'd play around.

Participants interested in joining band desired to do so, or they began playing instruments at an

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early age. However, some students reported that their interest in joining band came from family and friends.

**Family and Friends.** Students with a history of family members participating in band experienced a stronger motivation to join and continue in band. Participant 22 stated, "My family members were in band throughout school." Family member participation also influenced Participants 5 and 10 to join the band. Participant 5 said, "I had my brother who really enjoyed it [band] in middle school." Participant 10 said, "Both my siblings did band. They were playing the same instrument, and I kind of, I guess, it was just expected of me, and I was excited about it 'cause my siblings were excited about it [joining band]." Immediate family can serve as strong motivators for students to be in the band; however, extended family members can also influence students' decisions. Participant 14 said this about their cousin,

My older cousin taught me how to play the drums when I was in fifth grade.

Going into 6th grade, he was in the University of C.<sup>1</sup> percussion ensemble. He taught me how to play the drums, and he was really good at it, and I just wanted to join the band right after that.

Participant 19 was motivated to join band by their uncle and shared the following,

I was motivated to join band because my uncle actually played in the high school band. He also was involved in college band at U.S.<sup>2</sup> He played the trombone, and I played the trombone as well, so I actually used his trombone that he used in high school, so that is what sort of motivated me to get involved in band.

Family is a strong motivator for students to participate in band. Friendships are also a strong

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonym.

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motivator for students to be in band as they influence a student’s overall experience in band.

Friendships formed in band are integral to students' continued involvement. Participant 18 said, "The connections that you can make and just (like) people (like) make sure everyone wants to learn because that's (like) the thing that kept me in." These friendships aided in Participant 18 remaining in band because of the sense of community they developed while working together.

Students who have family support and friendships are motivated to join band. They are also highly motivated to join the band by their choice of instrument.

**Instrument Choice.** The instrument a student chooses to play in band influences their motivation to be in band. Students allowed to play the instrument they choose, or one they are interested in are highly motivated to be in band.

When I went out to the different rooms, and then I got to the French horn room, and I was like, oh, this is an interesting-looking instrument. I think I would like this, and I'd already heard about a bunch of different songs for the French horn, and I like the sound of the French horn, so that's what I decided to play. (Participant 7)

Also, students who approach their instrument selection with an idea of what they want to play are determined to play that instrument. Participant 17 knew what they wanted to play in band, and they were determined to do so,

I went in there knowing I wanted to do percussion, so it was kind of an issue at first because he [my band director] had those seats filled up in percussion. I stuck with it. My parents had to explain that that's what I was going to do.

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Other times individuals will change instruments after they begin in band to enjoy themselves more. Participant 4 stated,

So, I spent my 7th grade year playing the flute, and then in eighth grade, I decided that I wanted to change my instrument just to be able to experience something else. So, I chose the clarinet, and I liked that one throughout the year.

However, the element of surprise or the unknown can stimulate a student's motivation. If a student has no preconceived idea of what instrument they wish to play, the process of trying instruments can be exciting. Participant 6 stated,

Our director would have us test out every instrument, and there was something about trombone that I liked. I wasn't sure what it was. I really can't put it into words, but it was kind of just a gut feeling.

Participant 16 had a similar experience with their instrument selection in beginning band,

So, then they got me on trombone, and it was really cool. I mean, you know, I was in 6th grade and had a slide that I could, (you know), move around. I thought it was pretty interesting, and so I decided to give it a shot.

The instrument a student is placed on or chooses strongly affects a student's desire to join and continue in band. Student instrument choice also impacts the development of a student's love of music.

**Love of Music.** A love of music can impact a student's decision to join and continue in band. Participant 4 stated, "I joined band in the 7th grade, and I've always enjoyed instruments in general. I always knew I loved music, and I wasn't playing sports." Participants 17 and 20 made nearly identical statements regarding their love of music. Participant 17 said, "I think what

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motivated me to join middle school band, I mean, I've always loved music." Participant 20 said, "I think what motivated me to join band was my love of music." Participant 8 said, "I liked participating in middle school because I just loved music." Some responses participants gave were simple: they joined band because they loved music. Participant 20 said, "I get to learn to play an instrument and listen to some good music at the same time." Finally, when students' families support them in their endeavors to learn more about music, they are more likely to succeed. Participant 19 stated, "And I also love music. I'm a very musical person, and my whole family loves music as well." Students interested in band, have supportive family and friends, receive their instrument of choice, and love music are highly motivated to do band.

### ***RQ2: Overall Experience***

Interview response data for RQ2 presented two concept codes associated with their overall experience in band. The concept codes discovered from participant interview transcripts, potential for regret, and time management, were solid motivators for student retention.

**Potential for Regret.** Students are constantly concerned that their decisions may cause them to be in jeopardy of missing out on a tremendous opportunity or experience. Being in band or choosing not to be in band can be a source of mental conflict for many students. Being in band is a significant decision that requires intense thought because it is not for everyone. Participant 17 said, "Follow your heart. I mean, really, because band isn't necessarily for everyone, and it is a huge dedication of time." However, the students who continue in band end up enjoying it very much, and they know they would regret a decision to drop band.

Participant 7 also spoke of the potential regret that might occur if they chose to drop band.

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In the long run, after you graduate, you look back, and you say, did I really just (like) put all that work in [band]? And you'll look at the work, and you'll say, wow, that really paid off, it was worth it.

Both Participants 6 and 7 mentioned thinking before deciding to drop band. These individuals found that their peers had a passion for band that influenced their decisions, so they did not want to quit. Participant 6 said, "We all had a passion on that marching field, and we didn't want to stop performing." Nearly all interview participants mentioned that the friends they had who dropped band regretted doing so. Participant 13 said, "Well, a lot of the friends that I had that did quit have always said they wished they [had] stayed in band, so that could be one thing to take into consideration when making your decision [to quit or stay in band]." Students who regretted dropping band perceived their time in band differently after deciding to leave. Participant 9 also felt regret about dropping band following high school. They stated,

I could continue that [band] in college. I could continue making all these memories and very things, enjoying what I do. Whereas, (like), I could have quit [band] after high school, but then I wouldn't be able to enjoy it [being in band in college and the experiences that accompany it].

Participants 6, 7, and 9 had doubts about their decision to remain in band; however, all three remained in band because they took a chance. Students who took a chance and remained in band developed challenging life skills such as time management.

**Time Management.** Balancing workloads and schedules is difficult for students in high school and college. If students do not learn this skill, they may not continue in band in college. Many students who finished band in high school had a difficult choice about whether to continue in the band when entering college. Participant 8 remained in band in high school but did not

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continue band in college. They stated, "I just needed to get the feel for college before I did anything else, (like extra). I guess you could call it...I just needed the time to acclimate to the college life." Participant 14 made a similar statement, "And honestly, with what I've been doing this year in college [courses] or this first semester [classes], I wouldn't have had time for band, so it came down to time, and I hadn't done band in forever." Participants 8 and 14 stated the challenges of committing to the time required to continue in band after high school. However, Participant 19 made a different statement regarding time management. Participant 19 said, "Just encourage them to make sure they are using their time wisely and being involved with something." Although Participant 19 did not continue in high school band, they said they wished they had. They felt it was important for students to be part of an organization and learn how to manage their time in school so they do not experience regret.

### ***RQ3: Relationships***

Interview response data for RQ3 presented four concept codes that supported and encouraged students to remain in band: positive experience, band director connection, friendships, and family support.

**Positive Experience.** When band class is enjoyable and students are encouraged to create relationships with each other, participation in band can result in positive experiences.

Students must have fun in band, even when completing tasks, they may not perceive as enjoyable.

We had a healthy mix between assignments and actual music. We were playing a lot, so it was a good way to build up our skill individually, you know, just picking up our instrument, and occasionally, one of the assistant band directors would take us into their



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office and have us play some passages or just practice or whatever was needed.

(Participant 16)

Other participants spoke of their enjoyment in band from anticipating a penultimate performance or competition.

Make it fun; give your students an opportunity to have fun. For example, in marching band, most of the fun comes from the competition aspect; when you compete, when you perform, most of the fun comes from taking what you learned and spending the hard work to learn and applying it and feeling the rewards. (Participant 1)

Some participants stated that once they experienced an improvement in playing their instrument, they were motivated to become better musicians and band members. Participant 1 said, "The thing is that we were more self-motivated the better we got on our instruments." An additional part of making band a positive experience is ensuring that all students feel welcome and comfortable. Band directors who create a welcoming space within their ensemble and make time to get to know each student also contribute to the overall positive band experience. Participant 3 said, "Find a way to make everyone feel important." In a positive band experience where students feel comfortable around each other and the director, they will exceed expectations that they did not believe they could meet. Participant 6 stated, "We were struggling to learn, but we were doing it together." Students with a bond between themselves and their director find support and encouragement from within that bond.

Being able to go through it together. That's an experience to enjoy, and also, it's very real to the world. It brings you through and lets you develop your transferable skills, like working in the workforce. Because you're not always gonna have an easy time and easy

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manager, (like) you can always have managers that are just like that [not easy to work with]. It will try to push you to your most extent. (Participant 15)

Students who learn to work together in band develop skills that transfer to other professions and make lasting memories.

Some participants indicated that they considered dropping band but ultimately did not because of the positive experiences they might miss. Participant 16 stated, "I would really say. Just give it a big think because of all the things and the trials and the good times and the gratification you can get from achievements and concerts and competitions." Being in band can give students memorable positive experiences. The connection students form with their band director can also impact students' experience in band.

**Band Director Connection.** The relationship students form with their band director strongly impacts whether or not a student remains in band. Middle school band directors are integral to student learning, as they provide students the foundation for their time in band and can help bridge the gap between middle and high school band. Middle school band directors must make their class fun and engaging. Participant 3 said, "Band directors should try to make their class lighthearted and fun." Also, Participant 8 made a similar statement, "I like to think about my band director in middle school. They were very helpful with me picking up and learning how to play French horn since it was something I'd never seen before." Other individuals also had a wonderful experience in middle school band and spoke highly of their director. Participant 17 said, "My middle school band experience, I think, was great. I mean, I love my middle school director, and the people were fantastic."

The director's relationship with their students was highly effective when band directors found ways to relate to their students. Participant 9 said, "My middle school band director just

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kind of hyped everything up a lot, which kind of made me excited to be there [in band class]."

Participant 13 said, "I feel like it's just really good to be engaged with all of your students and try to build a good relationship with all of them." Participant 9 felt that their middle school band director did an excellent job relating to their students. They said,

I guess, like I said earlier, just keep relating to your students; that's probably the biggest thing. My band director always said that we wouldn't do something that he wouldn't do [a playing task of any kind that the band director would not do, no student would do it]. And so, he wasn't gonna push us to do like all this full music [hard music] and all this stuff [hard music] that we weren't ready for if he wouldn't want to do it as well.

Band directors who created a positive classroom environment developed a positive relationship with their students. Participant 2 said, "You have to be in an environment that makes you happy." Participant 6 made a similar statement about the positive environment they experienced in band. "The music was entertaining. The sound effects things were entertaining [part of the marching band show]. Everything that made the band a band was entertaining, so it wasn't ever (like) a dull moment." Band directors passed their positive influence on to students and their families.

Band directors' influence on student's families impacted retaining students in band. Participant 10 said, "My family loved the high school director, John Doe<sup>3</sup>, so they fully supported me joining and staying in band, and they loved coming out to see the band perform."

I had a very close relationship with all three of my band directors. I feel like that kind of helped me enjoy it a lot more. They always knew (like) if something was going on (like) they would always talk to me about it. (Participant 18)

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<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym.

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Participant 18 also spoke of the connection they maintained with their director after they dropped band.

One thing I noticed was when I decided to drop band. My band director never gave up on me; he still to this day, (like) I still go talk to him. I see him sometimes, we talk on the phone, so it, like, I feel like it's just a lifelong relationship that you can have with people, especially your band directors. (Participant 18)

A student's connection to their band director and the director's positive energy can be determining factors in student retention. Participant 8 said, "A big part of why I stayed is you have to have directors with really good energy towards what they like; my director did. I stayed because of him." Participant 8 continued, "My decision to continue band into high school band was in large part because of my middle school director, but as well as the friends that I made in middle school band." Continuing band in high school can be daunting; however, Participant 8 did so because of the relationships they formed with their band director and their ability to balance their time.

Band directors are very influential in the lives of middle and high school students. Band directors can serve as emotional support systems for students concerning issues unrelated to music education.

The band directors were always there to help me. And to be there for me if I ever had any questions. They're not only your band director, but they can also be a really good support system and a good friend for you. (Participant 18)

Sometimes, band directors will teach more than band in their classrooms.

One thing there are multiple things, but one thing I can definitely say made band the strong community and the healthy place, soft place to land. In high school, it was that

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John Doe<sup>4</sup>, our band director at the time he did not just teach music. In fact, he said this all the time. He was like; I'm not making good musicians. I'm making good people, so he didn't just teach music; he was a friend to all of us, and he taught; he would take a whole lesson some days to talk about life lessons that he learned growing up and that we should think about safety lessons. (Participant 14)

Band directors who help their students develop as musicians and as people provide a positive classroom experience. They also allow their students to form lasting friendships, creating a community of musicians.

**Friendships.** Students form friendships in band, which is often viewed as a community, leading to mutual support in band and throughout school. Participant 19 said, "I think band helps you make a lot of quick friends, and it helps you really get your footing in new circumstances. You always have a friend or person you may know in all your classes." Students who have friendships support each other through positive and negative experiences. Participant 3 said, "Through band, we all got to know each other and have friends." Participant 9 said, "And then I met like a lot of cool people throughout the three years in middle school [band]."

Well, I feel like it really opened an opportunity to make new friends that were like-minded. You know, I had kind of a group I got along with, a lot of people who had the same interests and likes that I did, and music as well. (Participant 13)

Several participants likened the friends they made in band to family. Participant 3 stated, "Beginning band, I feel like what made me stay there was the family we had." Participant 13 made a similar statement referring to family, "Umm, so it's in a way like I feel like when you

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudonym.

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start [band] the people that stayed throughout high school [band] it kind of becomes family [a community of musicians and friends] in a way.”

Ok, so in middle school, I think my band experience came from the community and people in it, so that's what made me want to be in it. Most of my friends were doing band, and I am still friends with them to this day. Even the ones that stopped doing band.

(Participant 15)

The friendships students form can become families that support each other, but it is also crucial for a student's family to encourage and support them during their time in band.

**Family Support.** The influence a student's family has while they are in band is powerful. If a member of a student's family participated in band, this could be motivating for a student to remain in band.

My family was very supportive of me being in high school band. My mom was in the same band. She was under Mr. Jones (Pseudonym) as well, his first drum major ever, and stayed in it for all four years with him, and she loved it. It was her favorite thing, but they were really supportive of me doing band throughout high school. (Participant 5)

Family members can also support their children by providing lessons and encouragement while their child is in band. Participant 15 said,

I had a lot of support from family as well. Like I mentioned earlier, my cousin continued to give me lessons through maybe 7th grade. And just overall great encouragement from my parents, telling me to keep it up and such.

Many parents felt that band was a good activity for their child. Participant 19 said, "I think they just wanted me to be involved in something, and as long as I was spending my time, you know, bettering myself with, you know, whether it's theater or band, I had their support."

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Participant 15 said, "They came to every single Friday night game and performance; they also went to every competition. They were really supportive. They really pushed me to practice more. They were extremely supportive about the whole thing.”

Parents often found that the band was a place for their children to belong and develop friendships. Participant 7 said, "They were glad to see me that I had found a place in high school. It's kind of like security for them." Band gives students a safe place, an activity that gives them purpose, and a place to belong.

I think one of the biggest, best aspects of bands is that community feeling. Like I remember my entire high school experience. Uhm, I only ever use my band locker. I'm always going to the band room almost every single day. Last, I remember eating in the hallways; I remember so many parts of my experience were just enthralled with that room, and I think it's not just the room; it's the people in it. (Participant 11)

Students in band became a community that many participants likened to a family. Participant 20 stated, "I think directors need to keep that [community] in mind and try to keep the group atmosphere like a family. It might help people stay in the band if they feel connected better to others in the band." The friendships and experiences students have are impactful.

My middle school band experience. It was wonderful. I made a lot of my best friends in band. That's where I got a lot of my core connections leading into high school, and it gave me a group to be with and kind of stick with. I felt in, I guess, in the good crowd. I guess that's a way to put it. (Participant 10)

Friendships and connections are also safe places for students. Participant 11 echoed this sentiment, "And it's that feeling you get, like just knowing there's a safe place on campus you can go through at anytime a day for any reason." The connections and bonds that bring

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familiarity and comfort are not only with friends, but they are also with the band director. These connections give students a positive perception of the band and their environment.

### ***RQ 4: Uncertainty***

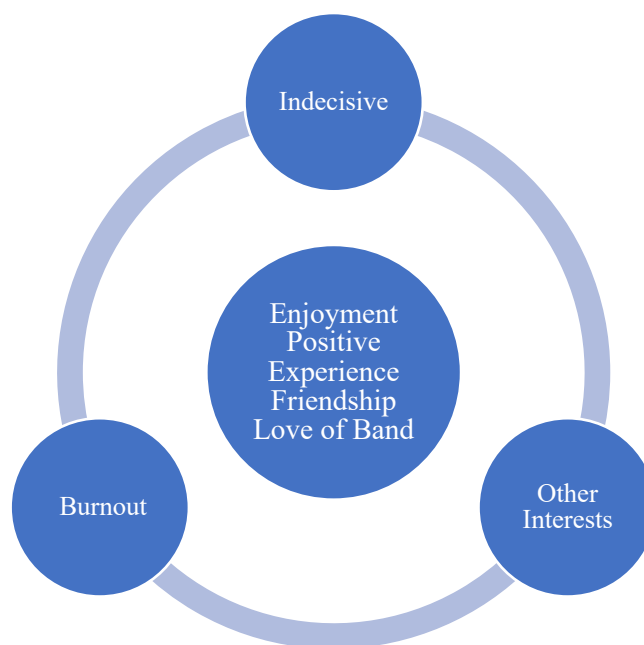
Uncertainty strongly influenced these students' decision to remain in band or not. All participants stated they joined band because they were interested in the activity. Students' decision about band was often swayed by outside influences and not solely based on their own perception of the activity. Students shared the concept codes of enjoyment, positive experience, friendship, and love of band amongst those who remained in band and students who did not remain in band. Only students who dropped band shared the concept codes of indecisive, other interests, and burnout.

### **Figure 1: RQ 4 Concept Codes**

*Shared and Unshared Concept Codes*



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*Note. This figure illustrates shared concept codes between students who remained in band for four years and those who did not. The circle's center represents shared concept codes, and the outer circle represents students who dropped band.*

**Enjoyment.** Students who enjoyed band were more likely to continue in band. Students base their decision to stay in band on their perception of their experiences and if those experiences were enjoyable. Participant 8 stated, "I just thought it was a lot of fun because we played a lot of fun music." Other participants were more specific about their reasons for remaining in band and stated that they enjoyed their time in ensembles. Participant 6 said, "My school symphonic band and our jazz ensemble were so good and so fun. I had no intention of leaving it." Some participants enjoyed their experiences in band but were skeptical about marching band.

I enjoyed it all four years. And really, the only thing that was on the table was marching band because I only did that my last two years, but that was kind of after I played football

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for the first half of high school, and I kind of realized I needed to change and I wanted to fully focus on music, but otherwise, when it comes to you know all other areas of band I had no reason to quit, and I remained. (Participant 6)

Some students wanted to use their joy as an encouragement for others.

But if you do, enjoy it, if there's like a little, just a little like spark of you that really enjoys music and has like deep down really likes music, I would just say continue to do it, and it'll be worth it. Like even in college and in high school. (Participant 10)

Other individuals stated specific instances or circumstances of what they enjoyed about band.

Participant 20, who dropped band (QB), stated, "We played some fun music, and I remember we always ended our Spring Concert with Old Time Rock and Roll. People in the crowd love it, and we looked forward to that every year." Participant 20 stated they enjoyed the reaction from the crowd when they played "Old Time Rock and Roll," and they also enjoyed their time and experiences in band. Participant 20 said, "We played a lot of fun music and took trips each year to Amusement Park A." Participant 15 (QB) fondly reminisced on their experience playing on the snare line in high school. Participant 15 said,

It was a lot of fun. I had a great time. I learned a lot. I was the only freshman on snare during marching season. There are only three of us on the drum line, so I was pretty proud to have made that accomplishment.

Still, Participant 17 said what gave them the most pleasure from being in band was, "It was a pretty neat thing to be involved in something other than just academics." Finally, Participant 20 stated this about enjoyment in band, "Band, music in general, is supposed to be fun." The experiences of both groups of individuals who remained in band or dropped band had similarities regarding their enjoyment of the activity.

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**Positive Experience.** Students who had a positive experience in band continued in band all four years of high school. Sometimes students can have a positive experience in middle or high school band but also have uncertainties about continuing.

I guess just like if you're not sure about it, give it a shot. If it doesn't work out, then you don't have to continue. But there's always the chance that it could work out and you could enjoy it. So, I mean just. Give it a chance. (Participant 8)

Also, individuals can have a positive start in middle school band but be intimidated about participating in high school band. However, it can be a positive experience if they have the courage to attempt high school band.

So, I was very nervous going in because it was such a big band. My freshman class was really large, and then I knew that my school had two marching bands, football band and competitive band, and I had seen the competitive band play a few times, and I was like, oh, that's something I really want to do. (Participant 10)

Students can also decide to be in the band because of the reputation built by the positive experiences of past students in that organization. Participant 20 (QB) said, "We had choir, orchestra, football, cheerleading, and all that stuff, but everyone wanted to be in the band." It is difficult for some students to know what organization to join, but students are drawn to join the organization if it has an established positive reputation. Finding a way for all students to have something positive to enjoy in band takes work.

An ensemble director needs to find what a student enjoys. Students should consider their enjoyment when deciding whether to remain in band or dropped.

Just look at what you enjoy, as I said earlier; if you enjoy it, great. If you don't enjoy it, get out of it. It is so, so much work, and it's such a big commitment of your time. Don't

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bring other people down if you aren't enjoying it. It's also better for you to find something you enjoy. (Participant 1)

It is also up to the student to discover what sparks their enjoyment. Participant 11 (QB) said,

It's their job to find out what's keeping them, and along with perseverance like there are a lot of days where, like my junior year, I was doing cross country and band, and so every afternoon I was either running or marching, and my legs were like destroyed all the time. But the thought of going out there and not only do I get to play my instrument, I get to create something, but I get to do it with all these people around me, people I enjoy being around. That was my driving motive.

Ultimately, Participant 11 did not continue in band; however, when they were in band, they discovered they had enjoyable experiences. This student accomplished this independently, but some directors must discover this about their own students.

As ensemble directors get to know their students, they also need to learn what they hope to accomplish by being in band. Many students are in band because they enjoy making music but are motivated by what being in band can provide them. For many, being in band allowed them to teach younger students. Participant 6 said, "When that happened the high school percussionists helped the middle school percussionists. I really enjoyed everyone being together in one class." Also, some students view being in band as an opportunity for leadership positions that can assist them by benefiting their resumes.

However, I think another reason would have to be the leadership opportunities, and at that point, it was maybe sophomore year when I'm like, this is a magnet school [magnet high school for select students], we are competitive at the state level at everything, and I want to lead in this group [band]. So my head was like ok, how can I get a good

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leadership position [in the student's band] so I can get to a good college like the University of F<sup>5</sup>. so that was one of the reasons why I stayed in band, so I could get a leadership position. (Participant 15)

Numerous interview participants found a positive benefit or experience of participating in band. They would not have received these benefits without being in band. Participant 6 said, "You never know whether you'll have a hole [refers to something missing] that can't quite be filled if you're not doing band." Sometimes the most powerful moments of a student's experience are the friendships that they make.

**Friendship.** Friends are often the reason students decide to join or drop band. Friends have a positive effect on student recruitment and retention in band. Band also offers students an opportunity to meet new people. Participant 1 said, "You can get the opportunity to get to know some really cool people." However, Participant 2 said, "But also because a lot of my really good friends were sticking with band as well." This statement is similar to the experiences of Participant 8. Participant 8 said, "My main reason was to stay around my friends, but another bonus for staying in band was that after four years of performing arts at my high school, we would receive a graduation cord." Participant 8 also stated, "I continued to play after my first year because I had friends in there, and I enjoyed being able to hang out with them outside of like just school, like at football games." Also, several participants stated they enjoyed the environment in band because of the friendships in the ensemble. Participant 4 said, "I just felt like I was surrounded by people [friends] I enjoyed being around, and it was a very positive environment." Participant 10 said, "I met a lot of cool people. We spent a whole lot of time together, so I got to know everybody better, which it kind of made it more like a family." The

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonym.

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relationships formed in band and the people that students are around are essential to having a good experience in band. Even students who dropped band were initially motivated to remain in band because of their friendships. Participant 16 (QB) said, "I had a ton of friends in band, and I think that's one of the main things that you know got me to stay in band."

Participant 5 said, "I think the more you are around people who are fun and enjoying themselves, the more you will want to be a part of something with those individuals in it." Friendships are powerful and motivating in many positive ways. Participant 4 said, "If there's people in there [band] and you all are sticking together and working together. Those are just some good memories and good life skills that you'll have forever." The value participants place on friendships helped them decide to remain in band for four years in high school.

I think the main reason I stayed all four years [of high school band] or one of the biggest contributors was all my friends. I made a family in band like throughout my whole section; through other sections, I wouldn't have been able to do it without like their support. There have been times I would have wanted to quit, but they kept me there.

Making sure I never gave up on what I really love doing. (Participant 3)

The positive relationships participants formed in high school band helped them make decisions about joining college band.

Specifically, in college band coming in, as an arriving freshman, marching band helped me meet a bunch of people before the first week of classes. So when I showed up to all of my new classes, there's a higher chance that I know people rather than people who are just moving in and may not know anybody. (Participant 7)

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Participant 16 made a similar statement about the friendships and community in high school and college bands, "I know the community [friendships] in college and high school [bands] are both fantastic. So it's a great way to network and make some lifelong friends."

Finally, Participant 4 said, "Umm, I think just really the relationships [friendships in band] is a good thing to take back because being a part of a group like this and teamwork and everything that you can take back from it is good for you."

The influence of friends can also negatively affect student retention in high school band. It is difficult for students to think independently from their friends, and often students follow their friends' example and advice. For example, Participant 18 said,

They didn't really want to go through high school doing it [band] because a lot of the older people kinda look down on band students. They call the band people band nerds. So they kind of looked down upon us [band students] as just [like] weird people, but you kind of just have to, [like], look past that. Just because you're in the band doesn't make you weird.

Participant 18's friends chose not to continue in high school band because the opinion of others influenced them. Participant 18 dropped band but did not state that their friends were the reason for doing so. Their friends influenced Participant 17 to drop band and spend more time with them in other non-band activities. Participant 17 said, "But I just I think I got led [taken away from band] by some outside influence of friends and what they were doing and what, you know, trying to do [something other than band]." Participant 17 stated, "I just want to go out with all my friends."

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Friendships are potent motivators for student retention and recruitment in high school band, or why students drop band. However, if a student has a passion for band and their friends encourage them to enjoy themselves, this passion will develop into a love for band.

**Love of Band.** Students who enjoy band and perceive band as an activity they love will remain in band all four years of high school. Participant 7 said they discovered their love of band from their band director. Participant 7 said, "The directors were very encouraging towards me [supporting, nurturing, praised at all times], and it really made me want to stay." Band directors who keep the atmosphere of their rehearsals light and enjoyable teach their students to love band. Participant 8 said, "I just enjoyed the atmosphere of it all because we could easily joke around with our band director and all this other stuff. And it was just a nice environment to be in."

Participant 16 found enjoyment from band through the exhilarating performances. Participant 16 said, "I found from early on, in the beginning, it was just the feeling of exhilaration and euphoria after playing in a concert and knowing you did well." Participant 11 enjoyed performing music and the physical activity of marching band. They said, "And staying in it [marching band] was, well, that was part of the reason, and also because I enjoyed being able to go out and be able to exercise in a fun way [marching band]." Directors must learn to teach their students to enjoy all elements of band to show students to love other ensembles.

Directors who teach their students to love music will see that love in ensembles outside of the typical concert band. Participant 4 stated, "I even joined choir my senior year in addition to band because I loved music so much." The love that students develop for band helps them through their journey through school. Participant 4 stated further, "I just couldn't quit it. I knew I shouldn't. I just enjoyed it way too much." Students who love music develop their love of music



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and are willing to work through the hardships of Advanced Placement courses and heavy workloads. Participant 7 made a similar statement,

So, I remained in high school because I just love the music. I love the program even though it was really hard and a lot of time commitment, like four or three days after school a week, along with AP classes and honors classes.

Participant 4 loved their experience in band so much that the thought of dropped was not something they could do. Participant 4 stated, “I don't think I could have gotten through high school as well as I did without band 'cause it gave me something to focus on and something to really enjoy.”

Being in band in high school is difficult, but if students are passionate about the activity, they will benefit from the opportunities that band can provide.

It was just like having that security of knowing that I have a friend group that I can go to, like I have some, like, good friends that I can like talk to. That I wouldn't necessarily make in classes that I had with people, but it was just kind of something that memories during high school give because there are some things (like) going to grand nationals, marching in parades like stuff (like) that just kind of was (like) a formative experience just for me that just made me continue doing band. (Participant 7)

Most importantly, band does not stop when school is over.

People that keep band in their lives in meaningful ways are happy. You know it can be beneficial, and it can be a nice escape. So always keep in mind that there is a way to keep music in your schedule and life if you try. It isn't always an easy decision to kind of let it go, but it takes thinking about alternatives to find a way to fit it in if possible. (Participant 6)

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Finally, students who keep band in their lives have learned how to cope with the stress that accompanies trying to achieve balance. However, even though they have learned to cope with stress better, they still may be indecisive about remaining in the band.

*Indecisive.* The experiences of many participants gave them a positive perception of their time in band, which influenced their decision to continue. However, not every individual had a positive experience. Participant 17 dropped band because they thought band was not an organization they wanted to be a part of. They shared, "I'm kinda going back to what I've said. If you enjoy it, do it. If you don't, find something you enjoy, find your niche [place to be, to have fun]." Participant 19 thought about dropping band because they did not have a positive experience, but their worries about making the wrong decision made them indecisive. They wanted to make sure they made a good decision about band participation for themselves and others, so they recommended speaking to parents and the band director before making a choice.

So just talking with your parents seeing what you want to do. You and them, you know, speaking with your band director as well. Your band director should be there to help you and support you and encourage you and whatever your decision is while still giving you, you know, the information that you need. (Participant 19)

Participant 14 spoke similarly regarding how anyone considering leaving the band must make sure it is the correct decision for them.

I guess this kind of goes back to what I was saying earlier. It is your decision and don't feel like you're gonna disappoint anyone 'cause it's your life at that point and, if you like your instrument, definitely keep it as a hobby because playing an instrument is one of the best skills you can have and it's a good place for community [friendships]. So, if you don't think you're going to find community elsewhere, it's also a great place to have that,

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those people around you and learning time management and all those other team building skills, though. (Participant 14)

Participant 16 made a similar statement to participants 15 and 19. However, they thoroughly examined their decision to dropped before making it.

I would just say that if you are deciding you want to go to college and do band from high school. All you can do is try it, and if you don't like it, that's ok, but you never are gonna know anything about it if you don't try. So definitely, if you even have any doubts about not doing it, or if you think that you wanna do it, that you're just not sure, just try it and never give up on something that you know you love. (Participant 16)

Students who make an informed decision about continuing in band have most likely had a positive experience in band, while students who have not had a positive experience in band may have other interests that have become a part of their lives.

***Other Interests.*** It is difficult for students to maintain interest in an activity they begin in middle school and attempt to continue through high school. High school has numerous organizations for students to participate in that are unavailable at the middle school level. Participant 17 said, "High school had more opportunities to join different things [organizations]." The many options that Participant 17's high school offered piqued their interest, and they dropped band. Participant 17 said, "And I just wanted to try something else while I was in high school. That's what led me to get out is to try some other things, new things." Allowing students to try new things is essential. However, some students have difficulty finding a place or friendship group in high school band.

Some participants have difficulty fitting in or finding friendships in high school band.

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But a lot of people just didn't find their place in band. Some didn't find their friend group there. That made it a lot harder for them to want to continue since all their friends were in basketball or whatever, and they wanted to focus more on that. (Participant 14)

Other participants chose not to continue because they thought about their future career path, and being a musician was not a part of that. Participant 14 said, "I didn't ever think I was going to be a musician." However, some students left band in high school to pursue athletics.

And then I also started to pursue some other sports at the school, swimming, tennis, and then there was also some other kind of outside stuff from, you know, football. You know, the student section or whatever. Also, there were other groups that I wanted to be part of, and then it just took up too much time to do band and that at the same time. (Participant 17)

Students who desired something different appeared to have a perceived plan of action; however, other students who left band in high school did not.

Some participants that left band in high school stated they did so because they wanted to take it easy. Participant 13 said, "I dropped out at the beginning of my senior year, so after three years of doing high school band just because I decided that at that end year, I just decided to take it easier, I guess." Other participants felt that being in band in high school took too much time. Participant 16 said, "I might have stayed, but it was just getting too serious, and it was also taking up a ton of time that I could have dedicated to other things." Other participants stopped band because they lost interest and enjoyment in the activity.

Participant 13 stated they enjoyed being in band but ultimately left because they became bored with the activity.

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I like playing sometimes, but the music was the same stuff. I felt like some of the music could be a little bit different. Throughout the years, I enjoyed playing something different [music]. And marching was also fun. I did like that, but it also became very tiring over the years to continue doing that. (Participant 13)

Other participants felt a lack of enjoyment from participating in band and stated that was their reason for losing interest and dropping band. Participant 20 said, "I remember not enjoying myself at all when I was at some rehearsals. I would look at my watch and run out the door when rehearsal was over." Participant 16 had a similar reason for leaving as Participant 20. Participant 16 said, "The seriousness of it all, it was really getting to be not as fun anymore. It wasn't what I remembered it being or feeling like, especially from the year before." The feelings an individual has about band can change from year to year. Some participants began viewing band as an investment in time.

Participant 20 viewed time and money as being used in the same way. Participant 20 said, "You have to treat your time like your money. Invest it!" Participant 20 said, "Do what makes you happy. Your time is precious; spend it like you do your money on things you want and need. If band makes you happy, do it; if not, find something else." Participant 19 also had a similar statement about investing time,

I mean, just sort of like I said earlier, look at your time, decide where you want to spend it. Digging deep, I mean really it should be up to you, and also you should have support from your parents.

Investing time also requires balance with goals and personal responsibilities. Participant 11 had to decide what was the best usage of their time in high school, "The main reason I left was just my home life and academic balance, trying to get that in sync with band. I had more

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responsibilities at home than I had previously." Several individuals cited investing time to meet personal goals as reasons for not continuing in high school band. Participant 1 recommended,

Really, take a look at your goals. If you enjoy music, but it doesn't line up with your goals, then I could say that, you know, maybe if you're thinking about leaving, that's understandable. But if you're going into something that you're going to need the team building skills that band can provide or the musical techniques that band can provide.

Then it's probably something you should definitely stay in.

Participant 13 made a similar statement. “If they really enjoy it and believe that it'll, I guess, blossom into something new. Then they should probably stay, but if they don't, then maybe not.”

Finally, Participant 15 found that investing time in an activity you are interested in that also incorporates spending time with your friends is extremely important. However, it is possible that investing too much time can cause a student to want to drop the activity or burnout.

***Burnout.*** The participants who dropped band stated that they perceived their main reason for dropping was burnout. The interview participants who first began sharing their reason for dropping out of band began by speaking about being burnt out in their current band programs. Participant 11 said the following, "I was done with band. I want to go in a different direction. I was burned out from the experience." The participant gave no specifics regarding their experience; however, it implied stress existed within the program, and I noted that in the memo journal. Participant 16 made a similar statement about their reason for leaving. Participant 16 said, "I just felt like maybe it was just better to not do it [band] that year just to be able to get through that year a little bit quicker." Many students reach their senior year and believe that dropping all non-essential classes will make their year go faster or easier. For other students, the

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lack of progress on their instrument and a desire to get out of school quickly causes them to drop.

Participant 18 said,

I dropped out after my second year. So, my decision came from a mix of things. By that point, I was a little bit burnt out on band. I'd spent a lot of time doing it, and I kind of felt I hit a plateau [lack of progress] musically on my instrument.

Other participants dropped because of a perceived loss of fun in the program and burnout.

What made me quit was in 10th grade after we had gotten Grand Champs [highest overall score at a marching competition, first place winner] 2 years in a row and competition band. It felt like my band director was making it a lot more about hey, we need to get this done; we need to get Grand Champs this year and less about hey, let's have fun.

(Participant 16)

Some students create stressful situations or place themselves in stressful situations because of their decisions. Participant 11 said the following about their friends who missed band camp.

They just missed out on band camp, and they weren't interested in marching, and because it's such a big aspect of high school band they didn't think they could continue with it [band]. They didn't want to do marching bands, so they decided to opt out completely.

(Participant 11)

Still, other participants desired to do band but could not because of the extra activities they were involved in at their school. Participant 11 said, "Being core commander, doing band, and AP classes. These three things, I didn't feel like I would have had enough time to do band well."

However, other participants dropped band because of the hostile environment their peers created.

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It is difficult for band directors to find ways to make their students get along and work together. The directors who can successfully do this can avoid student drama. Participant 20 said, "I left my junior year. I couldn't take all the drama and the negativity." Band students see each other more than other students. Tensions can become high amongst students when being together so much. Participant 14 said,

Also, during marching season my sophomore year, there was a lot more drama than there used to be going into high school band; there was never any in the drumline in my past years. It was always other sections that had drama, and everyone just saw the drumline as like the kind of rowdy crowd, but like one that always got along and did really well.

Finding ways to keep student attitudes positive supports student retention, but directors must also be aware of student playing abilities. If students are not progressing on their instrument, they will not enjoy themselves and are likelier to drop band.

Ok, so freshman year, I was in band; I was in percussion. I was in the front ensemble, the pit. My biggest goal was I wanted to be on the drum line; however, I just couldn't. I couldn't get with it. There was an awesome percussion instructor there, and he tried his hardest, and it just wasn't clicking for me. (Participant 17)

Student confidence in their playing ability and skill level is challenging to cultivate and nurture, and an inability to do so can cause student burnout. Participant 13 said, "Playing my instrument, I felt like maybe I just wasn't as good as everyone else and that I, I mean, like I marched, I did that, but just the instrument playing got a little bit difficult for me." Participant 14 made a similar statement about their perceived skill level, "I was really struggling to push past the point of the level of skill I was at, and the actual musical side of band never really interested me." It is difficult but necessary for directors to be aware of everything that causes the perception of stress



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in their students. The most stressful moments perceived by the participants were academic and personal conflicts.

Some students are hyper-focused on their academics and achieving good grades. Being in band takes time, and students may perceive that they may not have enough time to be in band and be academically successful. Participant 11 said, "I was doing more dual enrollment classes, and those classes are more homework intensive in my opinion, and so having that along with I started working finally I didn't think I could handle band and work and school." Any perceived loss of time can be stressful for students. Participant 11 continued by saying, "I felt like I would be making too many sacrifices doing band as well as everything else." Being in band can be a wonderful experience for students. However, to reap the full benefits of band, students must learn how to cope with perceived stress and manage their time.

### **Priorities**

The development of student priorities is a theme that encompasses all prior themes from this research. Each participant experienced events about their successful participation in band, making them examine their priorities. Every participant had a different experience which tested their priorities and involvement in band. They were tested unknowingly on how well they balanced their band responsibilities with others; ultimately, their priorities guided their decisions. All four major themes were produced by phenomenological reduction as an attempt to understand why students choose to remain in band or leave. The underlying theme of priorities will be discussed in the final chapter as it pertains to the essence of this qualitative research.

### **Post Analysis Conceptual Framework: Phenomenology**

The level of scrutiny of the data analyzed and how I focused on the topic during the analysis is known as intentionality (Peoples, 2018). I regularly reviewed interview transcripts

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and concept codes to ensure that the quotations and codes matched, and I performed more than one phenomenological reduction. The purpose for performing more than one phenomenological reduction came from the advice of peer reviewers and the need to delineate my themes further to form the essence of my work, *priorities*.

Also, I could not bracket out all my personal biases and experiences during the data analysis. An inability to bracket all of one's personal experience and opinions is known as horizon (Peoples, 2018). I unintentionally brought in biases during analysis, specifically in thematic development. My original themes for students who dropped band for RQ4 consisted of *indecisive*, other *interests*, and *stress*. I discovered from peer review that I was projecting stress through the concept code analysis instead of student burnout; this was my horizon. This was done, in part, by my interpretation of the findings from the interview transcripts and my horizon of the participants' situations. My peer reviewers agreed that burnout was the major theme instead of stress, as interpreted from the concept codes, thus showing my horizon during data analysis and thematic development.

### **Summary**

This research aimed to discover first-year college students' lived experiences related to their decision to remain in high school band for four years or drop out. I used semi-structured interviews to question 20 participants, 10 who remained in high school band for four years and 10 who did not. The findings presented four themes common to all participants supported by individuals' concept codes. The initial theme, *motivation*, provided each participant's reason for joining band. The second theme, *overall experience*, answered how participants handled the challenge of remaining in band. Participants who formed connections with their band director and friends persevered by managing their time and were able to remain in band so they would

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not experience regret. The third theme, *relationships*, explained what support systems or encouragements students received to continue participating in band. The positive experiences of band and the connection between peers and the band director formed a community within an ensemble that encouraged participants to remain for four years of band. Uncertainty arose as the fourth major theme. Each participant stated they joined band because of an interest in the activity, but they had reservations about band, or uncertainty arose while a member of the organization. This theme was delineated into the following concept codes: enjoyment, positive experience, friendship, love of band, indecisive, other interest, and burnout. These code concepts all influenced students' perception of whether they remained in high school band for four years or not. The encompassing idea that connects all four major themes and concept codes was each participant's *priorities* and the emphasis each participant placed on their *priorities*. *Priorities* describes the essence of how student decision-making was attributed to whether participants remained in high school band for four years or did not. The essence, *priorities*, will be discussed in the final chapter.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the research study and the conclusions drawn from the findings presented in Chapter 4. Specifically, it discusses themes and their relationship to the literature, connection to the theoretical framework, the essence, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover why high school students chose to remain enrolled in band for four years or drop out. The following research questions guided the purpose of this research study:

1. What motivated participants to join band?
2. What challenges or barriers did participants encounter to remaining in band?
3. What supports or encouragements did participants encounter to remaining in band?
4. How do participants describe their decision to remain in their band program for four years or drop band during high school?

This was a phenomenological research study. I assigned concept codes to quotations that best answered these research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). Following a phenomenological reduction, these themes emerged: motivation, overall experience, relationships, and uncertainty. After establishing themes from the research questions, I developed an overall essence encompassing all the research themes. The essence of the research was *priorities*.

### Relationship to the Conceptual Framework.

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While discovering concept codes and themes, I bracketed out my personal experiences, bias, and thoughts so that I could view the participants' experiences through their eyes. When assigning concept codes to each participant's interview transcripts, I used memoing to continue bracketing my thoughts and opinions to maintain my horizon. Horizon is "the present experience you are having right now" (Peoples, 2018, p. 30). Bracketing my thoughts helped me not to assume and project any of my subjective thoughts and opinions onto the concept code analysis (Peoples, 2018). Maintaining my horizon allowed me to keep my intentionality. Intentionality is "a participant's consciousness of something that is directed by his or her horizon of what something means or how something is perceived at that time" (Peoples, 2018, p. 91).

### *Themes*

**Theme 1: Motivation.** The concept codes interest, family and friends, instrument choice, and love of music formed the theme associated with Research Question 1, motivation. Students' interest in the activity and enjoyment once they joined, motivated them to participate in band. Students interested in an activity are more motivated to continue participation and place the activity high amongst their *priorities*. Participant 7 joined band because of an interest in participating in the high school band. The motivation expressed by Participant 7 to be in the high school band is related to the Expectancy-Value Theory because their motivation was dependent on their aspirations of success (Werpy, 1995). Participants 13, 15, and 18 began playing instruments at an early age and expressed a desire to continue learning in band. Their desire is explained by Atkinson's Achievement motivation which states that high achievers were likely intrinsically motivated, enjoyed learning, and worked to master a task of increasing difficulty (Werpy, 1995).

Students with family and friends who were in band chose to prioritize band. Like Moyer

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(2010) and Stinson (2021), Participants 5, 9, 10, and 19 were all influenced to join the band because of family member participation. Participant 18 echoed the ideas of Moyer (2010) with their remarks on the friendships they formed while in band. Students allowed to play the instrument of their choice were motivated to continue in band. Conversely, students who were not allowed to play the instrument they liked were less motivated as they may not experience success or enjoy performing on the instrument. Participants 7 and 17 knew what instrument they wanted to play when beginning band, and they could play it, allowing them to enjoy their time in band. Moder (2018) affirmed this assertion stating that students who enjoy playing their instruments become lifelong music learners because they develop intrinsic motivation.

The enjoyment a student experiences in band is directly tied to their love of music and impacts their motivation. A love of music that is cultivated and nurtured motivates a student to make music a priority. Moder (2018) stated that students who develop intrinsic motivation become lifelong learners of music and they enjoy performing. Barry (2007) stated that intrinsic motivation "describes the personal enjoyment and satisfaction a student derives from music making" (p. 24). Barry's (2007) remark is related to Participants 3, 4, 17, and 19 in that they expressed a love of music, explaining why they chose or were motivated to be in band. Student interest, family and friends, instrument choice, and love of music elicit motivation.

**Theme 2: Overall Experience.** The concept codes of potential for regret and time management formed the theme of overall experience within Research Question 2. Participants who joined band encountered these concept codes as challenges or barriers to remaining in band, affecting their overall experience in band. Although not directly stated, the assumption of regret existed with interview participants. Participants 6 and 7 advised that individuals thinking about dropping band need to think carefully before deciding because of the possibility of regret. In

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examining the literature, the idea of experiencing regret because one dropped band is absent.

However, a body of literature exists on this topic related to sports participation. Sports teams, like band programs, have similar characteristics. Students on sports teams aim to play together to the best of their abilities and win their game or match (Wooding & Prior, 2021). Regret has negative life consequences, such as ineffective coping skills and decreased life satisfaction which, if an individual does not receive appropriate support for these feelings, will last a lifetime (Wooding & Prior, 2021). Research on regret and athletes is still in its infancy; however, researchers reported that athletes suffered adverse effects on their relationships, social life, and negative life choices due to regret (Wooding & Prior, 2021). Regret in music is similar in many ways. Participants 6, 7, and 9 stated they did not want to leave high school, drop band, and remember their high school experience regretting their decision. Participant 13 did not regret dropping band; however, they said their friends experienced regret for dropping band and wished they had not done so. Being in band is challenging, but dropping band can also be challenging. It takes careful thought and patience to ensure that a student makes the best decision possible.

Band participation requires patience because it takes time to perfect the art of playing a musical instrument and achieve the desired level of competency. Band students often experience a delayed sense of gratification that can be frustrating for some. Growth and success require persistence and perseverance to stay motivated and dedicated to the overall experience. Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz (2003) concluded that students in music ensembles learned time management skills. Lautzenheiser (2005) stated that participating in band teaches students an understanding of investing their time wisely or time management. Participant 8 remained in band in high school but decided not to pursue music in college because they needed to acclimate to college life. Participant 14 dropped band in high school and did not continue in college, but like Participant 8,

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they learned how to manage their time wisely while in high school band. Students' time management is also consistent with Self-Report Measures, which states that activities will reveal an individual's interest or willingness to invest energy, indicating motivation (Werpy, 1995). Students who invest their time and energy in band are motivated to stay in band. Students who liked band as an experience and achieved time management skills enjoyed their years in band.

Several participants did not learn to balance their workload or manage their time, so they struggled with handling the rehearsals, daily practice, and other parts of band necessary to experience success resulting in individuals considering dropping. Also, participants who considered dropping remembered their peers who experienced regret when they dropped or considered dropping. For example, Participant 19 stated they regretted dropping and felt it was important for students to be part of an organization and learn how to manage their time in school, so they do not experience regret. The theme of overall experience was extracted from the concept codes regret and time management.

**Theme 3: Relationships.** After examining interview transcripts, the theme relationships emerged from the following concept codes for Research Question 3: positive experience, band director connection, friendships, and family support. The concept codes were representative of and encouraging towards students remaining in band. Students in band were motivated by the positive attributes of success and the negative attributes of failure. High-achieving band students expected to have a positive experience in band; therefore, their experiences were related to Lewin's Expectancy-Value Theory (Werpy, 1995). According to Expectancy-Value Theory, individuals who are high-achieving aspire for success (Werpy, 1995). According to this theory, individuals were motivated by the positive attributes of success as well as the negative attributes of failure (Werpy, 1995).



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Students who enjoyed band class and had friends in the band had a positive experience. These results are consistent with Stewart’s (2007) findings that friendships, performances, and high school band reputation were solid motivators for students to continue in band because these aspects contributed to a positive experience. Participants 1, 3, and 6 had positive experiences in high school band and regarded them fondly. Participants 15 and 16 also spoke about their positive experiences in band because they were with their friends. Band becomes a priority for students who enjoy band and their experiences.

The relationships students form with their band director also strongly impact whether a student remains in band, making it crucial for directors to develop a strong rapport with students. The impact a band director has on their students is long-lasting. Participants 17 and 9 had strong positive feelings towards their band directors; they believed their close relationship improved their experience in band. Garofalo (1983) argued that a quality ensemble leader motivated the students and their parents to generate their best products. Directors must first have a positive relationship with their students to encourage them to perform their best. Additionally, effective leaders seek input from their students about the aspects of the program they do or do not enjoy, resulting in a positive relationship with their students. Participants 3 and 19 stated that they desired their band director to seek more student input to improve the band while they were members. The band room in many schools is a haven before and after school for students to be with friends and enjoy themselves (Moder, 2018). The band director is responsible for creating a safe, positive environment where students can make connections. As Moder (2018) stated about friends and the band room, Participant 11 fondly remembered eating lunch in the band room, using their band locker, and the friendships they made there. Band requires students to spend many hours rehearsing and working together during and after the school day. This time is ideal

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for developing deep and meaningful relationships and making lifelong friends. Participants 3 and 9 spoke positively about the friendships they developed while in band, which harkens back to Moyer's (2010) findings. The importance of developing friendships in band enhances students' commitment to the activity (Moyer, 2010).

A student's relationship with family members can also enhance their commitment and band experience and strongly influence their decisions. If a family member was in band and supports the student's participation, the student is more likely to prioritize continuing in this activity. Elpus and Grise (2019) stated that students saw their parents' active role in their musical lives and were encouraged by their support. Participants 14 and 15 fondly regarded the support they received from their families, echoing the sentiment of Elpus and Grise (2019). Similarly, Participants 14 and 19 received encouragement from their families to be in band, echoing the findings of Stinson (2021). Students supported by their families, even if they chose not to continue in band, had a positive experience while in band. Positive experience, band director connection, friendships, and family support elicit the theme of relationships.

**Theme 4: Uncertainty.** The theme of uncertainty arose from the concept codes enjoyment, positive experience, friendship, and love of band and is related to Research Question 4. Additional concept codes of indecisive, other interest, and burnout were shared only among students who dropped band. Participants who enjoyed their experience in band managed their time and were able to maintain their priorities and did not experience uncertainty in their ability or their desire to continue band throughout high school. Participant's perception of their experiences determined a student's decision to stay in band. Participants 6, 8, and 10 enjoyed their time making music in band. As stated by Barry (2007), intrinsic motivation “describes the personal enjoyment and satisfaction a student derives from music making” (p. 24). Participant 20

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remained in band through middle school and partially through high school. Although they genuinely enjoyed their experience in middle school, they did not have a positive musical or overall experience in high school band. Hagner (1985) stated that students move on from organizations like other fine arts, sports, or clubs, and sometimes students move on from band. It is the director's responsibility to find out why they want to leave. Directors must use adaptive leadership to meet the needs of their students and the goals of their program (Albert, 2006; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Hayes, 2004). Using adaptive leadership, directors focus on reasons students may desire to move on and possibly discover methods to retain them (Albert, 2006; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Hagner, 1985; Hayes, 2004).

Students who dropped band may have enjoyed it. However, when faced with managing their time and priorities, they experienced uncertainty in their ability to manage these aspects of band participation. Students who did not remain in band experienced periods of uncertainty that many students who remained in band did not. The enjoyment of a student's band experience, or their perception of that experience, determined whether or not they stayed in band. Participants 8 and 10 had positive experiences in band and continued in band through high school, which supports Moder's (2018) findings. However, Participants 11, 15, and 20 did not have a positive experience in their band programs, yet they did make friends even though they did not have a good experience in their band. Stewart (2007) reported friendships are strong motivators; however, for Participants 11, 15, and 20, they were not strong enough to keep them in band. Nevertheless, these participants did enjoy some of their time in band. They likely performed in their ensembles with friends. They had positive relationships, or friendships they developed through the positive experiences of performing quality music together, which does correspond to Stewart (2007) and his statement regarding these being strong motivators for band retention.

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However, Participants 11, 15, and 20 did not continue in band because they did not have positive experiences.

Students who love band and perceive it as an enjoyable activity are more likely to remain in band all four years of high school. Of the participants who dropped band, many had an enjoyable experience during their tenure. However, it is not uncommon for students who drop band to love the activity, but also have other interests and priorities. My understanding of many of these students is that their priority switched to finishing school or participating in another activity in which they were also interested. Some participants who left band in high school stated they did so because they wanted to “take it easy.” All participants who left band perceived their main reason for leaving was burnout. Participants 14, 17, and 19 left band because they had other interests and were indecisive about continuing. However, when they left, they consulted with their parents or had a conference with their band director to discuss why they were leaving (Hagner, 1985). Their departure was not necessarily because of a bad experience, they desired to find another place to be. High school has numerous organizations that students can join. Students who experience burnout, may or may not consult with their parents or band director, as Hagner (1985) suggested. Participant 20 said, “I remember not enjoying myself at all when I was at some rehearsals. I would look at my watch and run out the door.”

Bernhard (2005) stated that burnout “has three distinct measurable components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment” (n.p.). Student burnout has consequences for academic, professional, and personal health. Burnout in high school students was found “with different school organizations and academic policies” (Walburg, 2014, p. 30). It also affected students’ academic performance and mental health (Walburg, 2014). Participant 20 loved their experience in middle school band and fondly

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regarded their time in middle school band but experienced heavy burnout and emotional exhaustion in high school band. They no longer wished to continue in high school band, and suffered from depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. Participant 20 said, “I remember not enjoying myself at all when I was at some rehearsals. I would look at my watch and run out the door.” Participant 20’s behavior in their high school band rehearsals and their desire to leave directly relates to the lower school engagement and achievement stated by Walburg (2014).

### *Essence: Priorities*

The essence encompassing all four major themes was priorities and the importance one places on their *priorities*. *Priorities* is the essence of how participants give merit or attention to competing alternatives (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The four themes found in this research, motivation, overall experience, relationships, and uncertainty play a role in determining student priorities. After discovering the overall essence of my work, I examined my transcripts again, bracketing out my opinions, thoughts, and experiences, and maintaining my intentionality, I discovered the following participant quotations which best illustrate the essence of this study:

It's that prime age where you want to be involved with things [school activities] you haven't ever been involved in, and then being in the band, there was something so cool we could do things that other students couldn't do. (Participant 17)

Students in high school, particularly those in band, are privileged to be a part of a wonderful experience. Though it requires a lot of their time, band is a worthwhile activity. Participant 17 said, "That's that. It was a pretty neat thing to be involved in something [band] other than just academics." Being in band must be enjoyable for students so that they will *prioritize* it.

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Participant 20 stated, "Make it fun. Band, music in general, is supposed to be fun." If band is fun, students will *prioritize* it and make room for it in their daily lives. Participants 16 and 20 agreed that band should be fun. Participant 16 said, "And you know, once again, making it fun. That's just a huge part of everything."

Band can be a memorable experience through fun times and periods of struggle. Students will make band a *priority* based on the enjoyment they experience and the friendships they form. Participant 12 said,

It's their job to find out what's keeping them, and along with perseverance, there are a lot of days where, my junior year, I was doing cross country and band, and so every afternoon I was either running or marching and my legs were like destroyed all the time. But the thought of going out there and not only I get to play my instrument, I get to create something, but I get to do it with all these people around me, people I enjoy being around. That was my driving motive.

Students who enjoy band will make positive memories of their enjoyable experiences; however, some students may face determining if band is a *priority* in their lives. Participant 20 said, "My dad has always told me to make smart decisions and ones that will make me happy. If you aren't happy, then find a place you will be happy." It is essential for a student to be happy in an organization, especially band, to make it a *priority*. When students reach high school, many must decide what organizations or classes to *prioritize*. Participant 11 said,

I'd say just go with what you believe would be best for you, but also if you are deciding to stay [in band] but not sure if you should. I'd say to think about all the things that you've been doing [in band] throughout the

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years, and if you really enjoy it, stay.

If students no longer view band as a *priority*, they must make a decision that is best suited to their time invested. Participant 19 said, “Look at where you are going to spend your time and ask yourself what is more important.” Students who question where they should spend their time may have forgotten that band is enjoyable. Participant 18 stated, “I would definitely say. If you know you don't want to do it and you don't want to continue, don't pressure yourself into doing it.” Once a student has made a decision, it is difficult to change their mind. If a student decides that band is no longer a *priority*, they will not continue. Participant 1 said this about being in band and *prioritizing* it, “Personally, if you don't want to do it, don't do it [band]. If you're going to be there [in band], give 100% so you get the benefits of improving and doing something really well.” Being in band is rewarding but also very challenging. *Priorities* receive merit or attention against competing alternatives (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Individuals in this study who *prioritized* band did not regret it; they relished their time in this organization.

### **Making Band a *Priority***

#### ***What Shifted Student Priorities***

Students in this study who quit band experienced a shift in their priorities either due to loss of interest, time, burnout, or a combination of these factors. Many of the students who dropped out of band stated they lost interest, or being in band was not enjoyable anymore. These students were vague with their descriptions of why this occurred. Other students who dropped out of band stated managing their time between the requirements of advanced courses and band was too much, and several students stated the stress of being in band with competing organizations, requirements of advanced classes, and stress of preparation for state level competition was more than they wanted to bear. It is my opinion that to have sustained

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enrollment in music programs, not just band, these issues must be addressed by band directors, teachers, and afterschool organization leaders working together to help students manage both course loads.

### *Keeping Band a Priority*

Ensemble leaders should strive for growth in their program while maintaining a realistic idea of their group’s abilities. Focusing on what is achievable for their ensemble is very important so that students do not become discouraged. I have found that students need to feel accomplished, not overwhelmed or disheartened by the challenges placed on them by their director. Performing at state conference or winning first place at a competition should not be the goal of the ensemble. The growth and accomplishment of each individual student and the ensemble itself should be the primary foci, with scores and ratings as a bi-product of their hard work.

Many students in music ensembles enjoy playing their instruments, but they are also there because band is a fun, social activity for students. Ensemble leaders should allot time for students to socialize, enjoy each other’s company, and allow students to get to know new and returning members. My suggestion is to include fun “ice-breaker” activities, games that are purely for fun, and activities that teach team building skills. I believe being in a music ensemble is like a sports team where cooperation, teamwork, and comradery is important. It is difficult for students to work together effectively if the director has not fostered connections amongst ensemble members.

Concert preparation is a unique opportunity to teach students about the value of hard work and personal growth. Perfecting music is a tedious process, but I believe part of a director’s responsibility is to help students understand hard work and see personal growth within the



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ensemble. Understanding and experiencing that growth results in students’ perception that hard work is a worthwhile endeavor. When I am preparing my group for a performance, I record them often. I refer to these recordings when making and adjusting rehearsal plans, but I also allow the students listen to these recordings so they can hear their improvement. When I am rehearsing my ensembles, I ask students to compare current and previous recordings. This is often an eye-opening moment for students because they are unaware of how much they have improved during the rehearsal process. I find this teaches students the value of hard work and that growth happens over time.

Students preparing for a musical performance should experience the joy of making music. The ensemble leader should foster this enjoyment by helping students understand the music they are playing. The director should educate students about how music works and bring their attention to dramatic, emotional moments in the music they are performing. Sometimes students can be hyper-focused on their own parts and miss the musical moments or how their part relates to others around them. It is the director’s responsibility to expand students’ understanding of the music they are playing. In my experience, creating excitement for what I hear from my students on a day-to-day basis can influence students with the same wonder and joy that I feel about their improved playing. I brag about their accomplishments, especially when I hear them turn their notes into music.

I encourage students to continue to improve their individual playing so the ensemble can improve. I teach students that it is ok to make mistakes because this is how we learn and grow. Students are often embarrassed by mistakes and see mistakes as bad or negative. Students need to understand that making mistakes can provide the entire ensemble with a learning moment. In my experience, students can be incredibly hard on themselves when they make a mistake. I use

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positive reinforcement as often as possible and focus not on the mistake itself, but on the growth that takes place when corrections are made.

The interviews I have conducted show that it is important to value your students' time. Many students commented in their interviews that the time commitment necessary for band often made participation difficult, especially for students involved in other activities and concerned with their academic success. I always use a rehearsal plan with my ensembles that is communicated with members of the group to ensure no time is wasted and everyone understands the goals for the rehearsal. A good ensemble leader is an effective planner and organizer who works to use rehearsal time as effectively as possible.

Sometimes rehearsal planning can be overlooked, especially when preparing for a competition. It is my belief that formal assessment, such as a marching competition or concert festival, should be part of a balanced music education curriculum. These can be formal or informal events, and they can be stressful for students and teachers if preparation is not done correctly. I have learned that the skills in the music classroom continually build on prior knowledge and experiences. A competition or assessment should be an extension of the knowledge learned in the classroom. It has been my experience that working to make the experience in the classroom the best possible educational experience for students has produced quality results for my ensembles at competitions and assessments. Several students I interviewed alluded to hyper-fixation on assessments or competitions by their directors, resulting in lack of enjoyment and ultimately students who drop band. In my opinion, a focus on the musical and educational experiences of students that will then possibly result in high scores and ratings is a much better model.

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I believe music educators should work to make the best possible musical experience for their students which includes nurturing positive relationships within the ensemble. The research I have conducted has taught me that this concept is imperative to retaining students. Positive relationships provide students with a connection and feeling of belonging. I believe that part of a director’s job is to create an environment where students are nurtured as people and that trust between members of the ensemble and the director is established. Relationship building serves to create a place for students to be a part of something bigger than themselves.

Also, I firmly believe that music educators teach more than music in their classrooms; they teach life skills. For example, time management was an issue that was discussed in my interviews, and ensemble directors who help students with time management skills may help students stay in band. By being organized and effectively communicating rehearsal schedules and deadlines, directors can ensure that students understand the time commitment necessary for band. Also, being flexible with student time and understanding of students’ other obligations will help foster a sense of cooperation, trust, and compassion between directors and students. I am very involved in helping students their classes because I often know students better than school counselors. I help to ensure they are signing up for the classes they need to graduate and that taking multiple advanced or AP classes is really in their best interest. Other life skills include social skills, working together toward a common goal, learning from mistakes, how to take criticism on their work, and leadership skills; all of which a director can help students in their ensemble learn.

My hope is that these strategies and suggestions from my personal experiences and observations may help others experience success. A final recommendation for current and future music educators is to define success for their program. This definition is different for many

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people and will change throughout an educator’s life depending on the circumstances of each school and program they head. I have observed music educators who attempt to mold a program into something unachievable due to resources, scheduling, or support to only achieve burn out, cause students to quit, and ultimately leave these programs. Success will not look the same for every program and will not always mean winning the next competition or performing at state conference. I believe it is important for music educators to set realistic, achievable, and sequential goals for their ensemble. A director’s and their student’s success and enjoyment of band depend on a director who is able to define success and stay in touch with their students needs.

### **Implications for Professional Practice**

This phenomenological study was designed to discover why high school students chose to remain in band for four years or drop out. I interviewed only 20 total participants, so findings cannot be generalized to the entire population. However, this study may offer applications for music educators in all disciplines about recruiting and retaining students.

Students have varying *priorities*; however, they will join groups they deem successful and fun in which their friend group participates. Also, students will remain in a group in which they have developed a positive relationship with the ensemble leader. However, not every student will remain in music ensemble from grades 6-12. For those who do, I recommend music educators do the following: nurture positive relationships with their students, promote a positive environment in the band room, encourage friendships among students in the band, find mutual learning goals for students to work towards, and teach students to manage their time to improve retention rates.

Directors should be observant of the students in their program and take the time to

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develop a positive relationship with them all (Hagner, 1985). Directors should be vigilant to early warning signs of students who may be experiencing burnout or considering dropping out of band. Students who are withdrawn and not as engaged in the band program may be suffering from burnout (Bernhard, 2005; Walburg, 2014). A director who intervenes early with a student considering leaving may have a chance of preventing their departure (Hagner, 1985).

My personal purpose for conducting this study was to discover why my student enrollment was declining from Junior year to Senior year. Like other activities, I understand that not every student will complete band from grades 6-12. Some students will be "done" with band just as with other activities they attempted. When this happens, it might be time for students to move on from band (Hagner, 1985). What is most important is to maintain a positive relationship with these students so that future students can see that the band director promotes a positive environment whether you remain in band or not. One of the goals of educators is to help students reach their highest potential, which may not be in the band room, but elsewhere. A positive compromise has been made if a student reaches their highest potential and still has a positive relationship with the band and band director.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Anyone wishing to replicate this study may desire to complete a qualitative case study of a particular school system with more than one high school to gather more detailed information as to the experiences of students in a more narrowed setting. It is also recommended to complete a mixed methods study using a survey to gather the information that can formulate interview questions for the interview protocol of the study. The qualitative portion of the study would consist of a similar phenomenological approach to the present study. Another recommendation would be a quantitative study investigating the retention rates from middle school to high school

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to determine the reasons students do not continue in high school band from middle school.

Lastly, a phenomenological study could report the lived experiences of high school juniors and their decision to continue with band through their senior year.

The review of literature was limited in that it referenced many problems students have with being in band. Specifically, these problems included scheduling, time management, varying priorities students encounter, and how best to address these situations with students. However, the review of literature was lacking in the area of student retention strategies in high school band. Because of this gap in the literature, any study related to student retention would be welcome.

### **Limitations**

The use of phenomenology limited the information I could gather for this study. During the study, I gathered information about the lived experiences of students pertaining to band but could not gather specific retention data from each student's school band program. The data for the study would have been richer had I performed a mixed methods study that gathered retention rates per grade level at each student's school and related demographic information. Furthermore, a mixed methods survey format would have generated questions for the participant interviews.

The band programs the study participants came from were varied, and any similarities between the programs were not accounted for or explored. These differences were related to classroom management expectations, grading requirements, performance expectations, performance opportunities, marching band requirements, and block scheduling versus non-block scheduling. Conducting this phenomenological study produced data about several students' lived experiences; however, this study was limited in scope because each participant's lived experiences were affected by the band program and band director with which they were associated. This study does not explore or account for those differences except as a part of the

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students' lived experiences. A targeted mixed methods phenomenological study of students from one school compared to others that are similar and different would be beneficial in developing methods for student retention in music and band programs.

### **Conclusion**

Twenty participants were interviewed to address why some high school band students choose to remain in band for four years and others do not. This qualitative phenomenological study fills a void in the current literature on high school band student retention and recruitment. The study examined participants' individual experiences to understand typical recurring circumstances, which aided in discovering the best possible retention strategies for high school band students: positive learning environment, a positive band experience for all students, strong friendships in the ensemble, and a director who recognizes student uncertainty can provide coping strategies to help students. The procedures for conducting phenomenological research were used to analyze the interview data because the data was representative of student experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Line-by-line concept coding and phenomenological reduction developed emerging themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Member checks, peer review, and bracketing ensured trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The themes reported the "experiences of the participants" and the overall "essence" of this phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 80).

Four themes evolved from this qualitative interview data: *motivation*, *overall experience*, *relationships*, and *uncertainty*. The concept codes for *motivation* alluded to student excitement to join and be a part of the band. All participants viewed band as an exciting activity to try. The second theme was related to discovering the challenges and barriers students encountered to remain in band. *Overall experience* was reported as the second theme because students with a

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positive overall band experience remained in band. The concept codes for the third theme, *relationships*, focused on the support that students received to remain in band. Students who received positive support from family, friends, and their band director stayed in the band. Finally, for the fourth theme, *uncertainty*, students who remained in band and students who dropped band shared the concept codes enjoyment, positive experience, friendship, and love of band. Students who drop band shared the concept codes of indecisive, other interests, and burnout.

The essence encompassing all four major themes was *priorities* and the importance one places on their *priorities*. *Priorities* are things that receive merit or attention against competing alternatives (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Individuals in this study who *prioritized* band did not regret it; they appreciated their experience and remained in band; however, participants who did not *prioritize* band left the organization. Directors need to develop a relationship with the students in their program to ensure their program meets the needs of all students. Relationships are important in motivating students to make band a *priority*. Students who *prioritize* band become lifelong music learners and can experience the positive benefits that being in band through high school can bring. Students who continue band through high school will hopefully continue learning about music for the rest of their lives.



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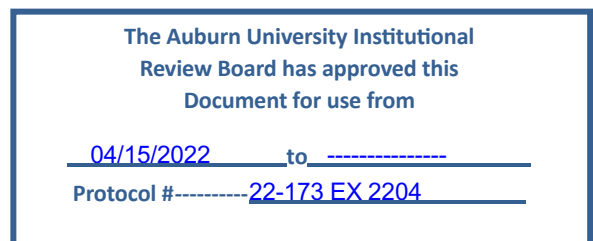
## Appendix A: IRB Zoom Protocols

### Zoom Guidance

Given current safety concerns resulting from the COVID 19 pandemic, more than ever, the safety (risks) to research personnel and participants in human subjects’ research must be a priority. As a research study continues, the IRB stresses the need for the Principal Investigator to ensure (at least) the following when utilizing *Zoom* technology and beyond:

- a. Participants are reminded to protect their privacy by completing activities in a private space, to ensure conversations are not overheard.
- b. Participants are encouraged to disable “cookies” and close device browser.
- c. Participants are told how and where *Zoom* recordings are saved.
- d. Investigators must use *Zoom* provided by Auburn University (safety features built within), as other platforms may have limitations.
- e. Investigators must share *Zoom* recordings in a safe, private area/way that only research staff can access.

Researchers have latitude how to present *Zoom* information to participants. Reminders can be part of consent discussions, can be included as a reminder in the information letter/consent form, or as a reminder at the beginning of the *Zoom* interview, the goal of the guidance is to remind researchers and participants that *Zoom* use includes privacy concerns.



“PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL BAND”

**Appendix B: Social Media Recruitment Statement**

Hello,

I am a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Auburn University. I am conducting a research study to meet the requirements for completing my Ph.D. in Music Education.

I am searching for high school band directors from the states of: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee to assist me with my study. I need 20 total participants, former students who completed four years of high school band with you or they decided to stop during their four years of high school.

Participants will be asked to complete 15 interview questions, which will take 45 minutes to complete. Following the interview, the participants will be contacted for review of the interview transcript and any possible follow-up questions; this will take 45 minutes to complete. Total Participant time commitment will be one hour and 30 minutes.

All interviews will be conducted by *Zoom* in a location of participants’ choice. Participants will be encouraged to choose a private, secure location and turn off their browsers before participating in the *Zoom* meeting.

There is no compensation for this interview. However, band directors will be able to use the data collected to inform future decisions about how to recruit and retain high school band students for four years. Other than collecting that you are a student in college, age, and instrument, there are no other identifying markers. Therefore, confidentiality will be maintained.

If you would like more information about this study, an information letter can be obtained by sending an email to the address below.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [ckh0018@auburn.edu](mailto:ckh0018@auburn.edu) or my advisor, Dr. Nancy Barry, at [nhb0002@auburn.edu](mailto:nhb0002@auburn.edu).

Thank you for your consideration,



Charlie Herron

The Auburn University Institutional  
Review Board has approved this  
Document for use from  
04/15/2022 to -----  
Protocol # ----- 22-173 EX 2204

Appendix C: Recruitment Email

“PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL BAND”

Dear Perspective Interview Candidate,

I am a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Auburn University. I am conducting a research study to meet the requirements for completing my Ph.D. in Music Education. I have asked your band director to send emails to 6 student candidates, including yourself, to participate in my research study to examine the reasons students choose to remain or not remain in band all four years of high school. Your high school band director has chosen you to participate in this study.

Participants will be asked to complete 15 interview questions, which will take 45 minutes to complete. Following the interview, the participants will be contacted for review of the interview transcript and any possible follow-up questions; this will take 45 minutes to complete. Total Participant time commitment will be one hour and 30 minutes.

All interviews will be conducted by *Zoom* in a location of participants’ choice. Participants will be encouraged to choose a private, secure location and turn off their browsers before participating in the *Zoom* meeting.

There is no compensation for this interview. However, band directors will be able to use the data collected to inform future decisions about how to recruit and retain high school band students for four years. Other than collecting that you are a student in college, age, and instrument, there are no other identifying markers. Therefore, confidentiality will be maintained.

If you would like more information about this study, an information letter can be obtained by sending an email to the address below, or you may call me at 478-919-3180.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [ckh0018@auburn.edu](mailto:ckh0018@auburn.edu) or my advisor, Dr. Nancy Barry, at [nhb0002@auburn.edu](mailto:nhb0002@auburn.edu).

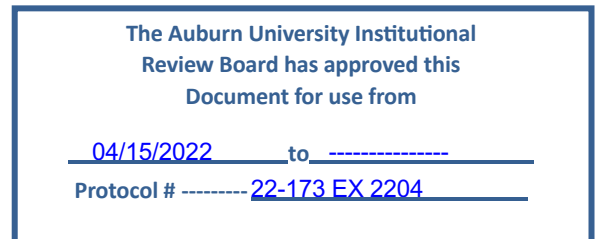
Thank you for your consideration,



Charlie Herron

Ph.D. Student Auburn University

Band Director



**Appendix D: Information Letter**



## Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Script prior to interview:

*I'd like to thank you for being willing to participate in this interview. I am interested in learning about the reasons high school students who participated in high school band remained in it for four years or decided to quit. Our interview today will last approximately forty-five minutes, during this time I will ask you about your beginning in band, your decision to join high school band, and the factors that influenced your decision to remain in high school band or drop out. I will also ask for your recommendations high school band directors can use to aid in recruitment and retention of high school band students.*

[Review the Information Letter and invite any questions.]

*Prior to our meeting, you were emailed an information letter describing your participation in the study and requesting your permission to audio record our conversation.*

*Are you still ok with me recording (or not) as well as participating with our conversation today?*

*\_\_\_Yes\_\_\_No*

*If yes: Thank you! Please let me know if at any point you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you say off the record. Or if you wish to stop participating.*

*If no: Thank you for letting me know. I will destroy any information I have collected so far pertaining to your participation in this study.*

*Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions]*

*If any questions arise at any point in our interview, I will be more than happy to answer them.*

1. *What motivated you to join band?*



## “PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL BAND”

2. Describe how you began on your band instrument in Middle School or High School?

*-When and how did you first learn to play a band instrument?*

3. Tell me how you were placed on your first band instrument?

*-Was this instrument your first choice or were other factors involved? Please explain.*

*-Are you still on the instrument that you started? If you changed instruments, please explain.*

4. How would you describe your beginning band experiences? In answering this question, you can focus on the people, the families, the organizations, or anything else that stands out to you the most when you think about this experience.

### **Decision to join High School Band**

*Thank you for your responses. I'd like to now ask you questions regarding your decision to join high school band.*

5. How do you think your beginning band experience influenced your musical decisions in high school?

6. Following your first year of high school band can you describe why you chose to remain in high school band?

*-If you dropped out of high school band after your first year, please explain your decision to drop out.*

7. Did you have friends who decided to not join high school band after middle school band?

*-What do you think influenced their decision to not join high school band? Please explain.*

8. Describe your family support regarding your decision to be in high school band?

### **Decision to remain or not in High School Band for four years**

*Thank you for your responses. I'd like to now ask you questions regarding your decision whether or not you remained in high school band four years.*

“PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL BAND”

9. You mentioned that you finished four years of high school band. Describe your reasons for doing so?

*-If you dropped out of high school band after your first year, can you tell me how you made your decision to do so?*

10. What advice would you give band directors to help them retain students who are considering leaving high school band?

11. What advice would you give high school students contemplating not staying in high school band for four years?

**Students continuing band in college.**

*Thank you for your responses. I will now ask you questions regarding your decisions to pursue band in college.*

12. Describe your reasons for continuing in College Band?

*-If you did not continue in college band, what were your reasons for this decision?*

13. Did your peers continue in college band? Are their reasons similar? Please explain.

*-If they chose to not continue in college band, did they mention what their reasons were?*

14. Would you like to mention anything about your high school band experience that you feel may be beneficial in assisting band directors with retention of their students?

15. Do you have anything that may be beneficial in helping students decide as to whether they should continue in high school or college band?

*Thank you for your participation in this interview study. As a reminder, all information will be made confidential using pseudonyms. The recording of this interview will be kept in a locked location, accessible only to myself. If you think of any questions after leaving here feel free to contact me using my auburn email: [ckh0018@auburn.edu](mailto:ckh0018@auburn.edu) or my supervisor Nancy Barry at: [nhb002@auburn.edu](mailto:nhb002@auburn.edu).*

*Your participation is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.*

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this Document for use

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