

**A Descriptive Study of Elementary Student Access to
School Music Education in Twelve Large
Metropolitan Areas in the Southeastern United States**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Music Education

Auburn, Alabama
December 14, 2024

Keywords: music teacher, student demographics, access, equity, elementary, primary

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Abstract

Music education is an important part of a well-rounded elementary school curriculum. Unfortunately, not every school provides their students with music classes. Schools in predominantly White and wealthier communities seem to provide music classes more often than communities of color and poorer communities. The purpose of this descriptive quantitative study is to describe access to elementary music education based on the demographics and median income in 12 major cities within six states in the Southeast. The cities in the study include Birmingham and Huntsville, Alabama; Fayetteville and Little Rock, Arkansas; Jacksonville, Florida; Atlanta and Augusta, Georgia; Gulfport and Jackson, Mississippi; and Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee. The central question for this research includes: Are all students, regardless of race or socio-economic status, receiving equal access to a well-rounded education that provides a dedicated time for music instruction?

The results showed that in some areas all elementary schools employ a music teacher. Other areas did not have music teachers in all elementary schools. One area was less likely to have a music teacher with a majority of Black students or students of color compared to schools with a majority of White students, which always had a music teacher. The results of this same area revealed a significant relationship between income and access to music education. Title I schools were significantly less likely to have a music teacher than schools that do not receive Title I funding. These findings highlight the need to address racial and economic inequalities in access to music education.

More research is needed to understand the causes of these disparities and to find ways to close the gap in music education access. Future studies should cover more regions, review how policies affect access, and examine school leadership's decisions on music programs. Addressing

disparities in access to music education is essential for an equitable, well-rounded education for all regardless of race or socio-economic status.

Acknowledgments

Completing this dissertation has been a journey that would not have been possible without the guidance, support, and encouragement of many wonderful individuals.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Jane Kuehne, whose expertise, patience, and thoughtful feedback have been invaluable throughout this process.

I would also like to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Nancy Barry, Dr. Matthew Hoch, and Chih-hsuan Wang, for their insightful questions, suggestions, and encouragement. Each of you has played a critical role in shaping this research and pushing me to think more deeply about its implications.

To my cousin, Anna Lee Beyer, and colleagues, Christopher Loftin, and Scott Sexton, thank you for taking the time to answer my questions, provide feedback, and offer invaluable suggestions that enriched this work. Your collaborative spirit and willingness to share your expertise made this process more insightful and enjoyable.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the faculty and staff at Auburn University, who have created a nurturing and intellectually stimulating environment in which I could grow both academically and personally.

To my friends, Tiffani, Deanna, Justin, Valerie, Brian, Franklin, James, and Roy, thank you for your constant encouragement, humor, and for being a source of relief during the more challenging moments. To “my person,” your support and belief in me have carried me through the tough times, and I am incredibly fortunate to have you in my life.

Finally, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my family. To my parents, thank you for your unconditional love, encouragement, and belief in me. To my children, Omar and Joe, your

patience, understanding, and endless support have sustained me throughout this journey, and I am forever thankful. I love you! Thank you, Door Dash, for helping me keep the boys fed and happy.

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who have supported and believed in me, and to those who continue to inspire me to pursue knowledge and understanding.

Thank you all.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Music education is an essential part of a well-rounded education, helping young students develop creativity, social skills, and discipline. However, many elementary schools don't have a music teacher, which limits students' chances to explore music. Bringing music education to all elementary schools would give students a richer learning experience.

Music education is nationally supported by The Every Student Succeeds Act, which recognizes music as an essential component of a "well-rounded education" (ESSA, 2015). Additionally, the National Association for Music Education provides detailed guidelines outlining what effective music education should entail, including recommendations for the number of weekly instructional minutes students should receive to ensure a comprehensive music learning experience (NAfME, 2022).

The Arts Education Data Project (Morrison, et. al., 2022) looked at the participation of music and arts education in public schools in 2019. The report revealed that:

3,609,698 students in U.S. public schools do not have access to music education, and that 2,095,538 students do not have access to any arts education (defined as dance, music, theater or visual arts). While 92% of students do have access to music education, the new data also reveal that a disproportionate number of students without access to music and arts education are concentrated in public schools in major urban or very rural communities; in public schools that have the highest percentage of students eligible for free/reduced-price meals; and in public schools with a student population that is majority Black, Hispanic, or Native American (p.1).

Elementary school children benefit from music education, not just by learning music, but also through improved social-emotional learning (SEL), creativity, and cognitive skills. Music helps with emotional expression, collaboration, and problem-solving. However, budget cuts and high-stakes testing often result in the removal of music programs from schools, disproportionately affecting students of color and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who have fewer opportunities to access music education. Strengthening music programs is essential to offering all students a well-rounded and equitable educational experience.

Music classes are an ideal place to support students' SEL needs. Many music teachers have successfully integrated SEL into their classrooms (Racshdorf, May, & Searcy, 2021). Unfortunately, music classes are frequently eliminated when budgets are cut. I have seen an increase in reading coaches, math coaches, and math and reading interventionists contrasting with a decrease in fine arts classes. How much SEL are these coaches and interventionists providing our students?

The Opportunity-to-Learn (OTL) Standards from the National Association for Music Education (NAfME, 2022) provide guidelines for the minimum requirements for general music education at the elementary level. The 2022 checklist outlines standards to ensure that all students have equitable access to quality music education. One of the key minimum standards is instructional time: Every elementary student should receive at least 90 minutes of music instruction per week. Music instruction should be delivered by a highly qualified music educator.

Berman (2018) stated there is a long history of advocacy for high-quality music education for all students. However, budget cuts to music education continue to rise (Burrack, et. al., 2014). In a 2020 study of access to arts education in America, Elpus found school size affected the number of arts education classes offered. Elpus also found “there is a clear

association between the socioeconomic status of students attending a school and the availability of arts education at the school” (p. 66).

The importance of music education in schools is a pressing concern for many parents, who argue that it plays a crucial role in their children's overall development and should be treated as a core subject. Hansen (2023) examined parents' views on the importance of music education in schools, revealing that many considered it a crucial part of their children's overall development. Parents advocated for music to be treated as a core subject, like math or language arts, due to its benefits in fostering creativity, cognitive growth, and emotional well-being. They also highlighted music's role in developing skills like discipline and teamwork, while expressing concern over budget cuts that threaten music programs, particularly in low-income schools. Additionally, parents emphasized the positive impact of music on academic achievement and pushed for equal access to music education for all students, regardless of socioeconomic background, calling for it to be integrated into the core curriculum.

The increasing emphasis on high stakes testing in subjects like math and reading has led to music education being deprioritized, despite its recognized value and positive impact on student development. West (2012) mentioned that even though music is considered a core subject by law, it is often being cut out of the schedule to make room for more math and reading instruction due to high-stakes testing. Lang (2015) stated Common Core and No Child Left Behind prioritize subjects that are tested over those that are not. Lang stated, “This culture has forced our education system to go all in on subjects that are tested at the expense of those that are not” (p. 17). The following literature review looks at how budget cuts affect music programs, why music education should be offered to everyone, and how music education can help students' social and emotional learning.

Need for Study

Music education should be included in a well-rounded education for all elementary school students. However, not all elementary schools in my area have music teachers. It concerns me that so many schools in the Southeast are cutting music classes. I am told they are being cut because of low enrollment, but I also see more academic interventionists being hired. If students need social-emotional learning to be successful in school, and music education often helps SEL, then all schools must have music education. How can we expect our students to succeed academically when we are not meeting their basic needs first? Because education is mainly managed at the state, county, or district level, it appears necessary to conduct localized assessments of access to music education (Salvador & Allegood, 2014). While similar studies have been completed in other areas of the country, a survey of the Southeast is necessary.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this descriptive quantitative study was to describe access to elementary music education based on the demographics and median income of each area within 12 major cities in the Southeast. The following research questions guided this study.

1. How many schools in the selected geographic area employ elementary music teachers?
2. What are the differences between specific demographic groups based on having a music teacher, or not having a music teacher?
 - a. What differences exist between students of different races or ethnicities?
 - b. What differences exist based on household income?
 - c. What differences exist based on whether the school is a Title I school?

The null hypothesis asserts no significant difference between the race or ethnicity of students who have a music teacher, no differences based on household income, and no differences between Title I and non-Title I schools. The dependent variable is the presence or absence of a music teacher. The independent variables are the demographics.

I focused on major metropolitan cities in the states surrounding my home state of Alabama for this study. My field project for my Education Specialist degree focused on the public-school districts in the Birmingham/Jefferson County area. I wanted to see how this area compares to other major cities in surrounding states as a follow up to my previous research. I collected data from the following cities: Birmingham and Huntsville, Alabama; Fayetteville and Little Rock, Arkansas; Jacksonville, Florida; Atlanta and Augusta, Georgia; Gulfport and Jackson, Mississippi; and Memphis, and Nashville, Tennessee.

Limitations

This study was limited to the information that was publicly available. This study was limited to currently available online school demographic data. The data from the current and previous school years were not yet publicly accessible. The number of music teachers was calculated using available data from the 2023-2024 school year, while the demographics were taken from the 2022-2023 school year because the current year's data were not publicly available at the time of this study. Additionally, in some states, such as Alabama, teacher units are determined by enrollment during the first 20 days of the school year (Code of Alabama, 2024, ASDOE, 2023).

I attempted to acquire data from two major metropolitan areas in each state in the Southeast. However, while I requested access information from 3 counties, I was only able to gain access to data from one county, which is Dade County. The other two counties did not

respond to multiple requests for information regarding the presence or absence of music teachers in elementary schools.

Delimitations

This study does not look at the frequency or length of music classes. When I attempted a similar study, only a few people responded to my survey asking if their school had a music teacher. I asked colleagues, sent emails, and called schools to find out which schools had a music teacher, and which did not. Since so few people responded to the survey, I decided not to focus on how many minutes of music instruction each demographic received. I limited my focus to whether the school has a music teacher and the school's demographic data. I used publicly available information on school and district websites, sent emails, and made phone calls to collect the data I needed instead of sending out a survey.

This study does not represent all schools in all areas. It does not check if the music teacher is highly qualified or certified in music education. This is not a comprehensive gathering of data from the United States. This study aimed to get an idea of access to elementary music education from a limited number of cities in the Southeast. I limited the study to select cities in the Southeast because I do not have access to enough information to conduct this study in every state in the United States or every city in the Southeast. I chose to use the major metropolitan areas from the states surrounding my home state of Alabama to see if there were similarities in demographics and access to elementary music education.

Music education is widely recognized as an essential part of a well-rounded education, contributing to the development of students' creativity, social-emotional skills, and academic abilities. Despite the established benefits and support for music education in federal policy, such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), many elementary schools still lack access to music

instruction. Disparities in access to music education are often linked to the socioeconomic and demographic makeup of schools, with students from lower-income and predominantly minority backgrounds facing reduced opportunities. Budget constraints and the prioritization of high-stakes testing in subjects like math and reading have created more inequalities, leading to cuts in music programs. This literature review will explore previous findings on the budgeting issue facing music education, the disparities in access, and the need for social-emotional learning through music.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of this descriptive quantitative study was to look at access to elementary music education based on the demographics and median income of 12 major cities in the Southeast. This research aimed to highlight the disparities in music education and how these differences affected students. The literature review covers important topics such as budget cuts that threatened music programs, equity in access to education for underserved communities, and how music education supports social and emotional learning. By exploring these areas, the study provided a clear understanding of the state of elementary music education.

Budget Cuts

School administrators often have the challenging task of cutting teaching units because of low enrollment or budget cuts. In the state of Alabama, music teachers are hired through local funds. There is no money earmarked by the state to provide music educators to school districts. Burrack and colleagues (2014) investigated budget cuts to music education in three states in the Midwestern United States. They reported that education funding has been cut because of a recent recession.

Music programs are understaffed and underfunded even though enrollment in music education remains high. Administrators and school boards may not realize the negative consequences of their decisions to cut funding and staffing for music education. Underfunding and lack of resources in low-income schools limits access to qualified teachers and consistent programs (Dugar, 2023). Burrack and colleagues stated, “Administration and school boards require accurate, valid, and reliable information in order to discern the consequences of their decisions related to allocations and staffing” (p. 37).

The impact of funding cuts on music programs is especially severe for schools that were already struggling with limited resources Burrack and colleagues (2014) were concerned about the loss of music learning for these students. They compare music programs that were already underfunded with schools that were well supported but have lost funding for music. “Loss of funding on a music program that had historically been underfunded is very different than the loss of funding for a well-supported music program, although neither scenario is preferred” (p. 40). They suggest the community come together to advocate for music in the schools by increasing visibility and by making connections within their community.

Although music is valued for its contributions to educational goals, external pressures like budget cuts and testing requirements often undermine music programs. A study by Abril and Gault (2006) found that principals recognize the potential of music to contribute to both musical and non-musical educational goals. However, it also revealed concerns about the negative impact of external factors like the No Child Left Behind Act, budget constraints, standardized tests, and scheduling issues on music programs. Principals emphasized the necessity for greater funding and awareness of the benefits of arts programs to effectively support music education.

Booster organizations can provide valuable support to music programs, but their benefits are often limited to wealthier schools, deepening inequalities for low-income areas. Advocacy for music education is necessary, however, Elpus and Grise (2019) found music programs with booster organizations can help raise funds to help with the success of a music program. Schools in higher socioeconomic areas can raise more funds than schools that are already struggling financially. Booster clubs do not help the underprivileged and only seem to work in already privileged areas.

Budget cuts, declining enrollment, and lack of respect for arts educators have led some urban school districts to eliminate arts specialists entirely. Shaw (2018) described “how one urban school district (Lansing School District in Lansing, Michigan) eliminated its elementary arts specialists” (p. 393). The district chose to eliminate all arts specialists because of declining enrollment caused by school choice, facilities issues, and state aid decreases. They also had non-endorsed teachers placed in specialist roles because arts educators were not respected and were considered a “break” and not a “real teacher.”

There is hope for music education according to a study by Major (2013). Major looked at a district that was deciding if they should keep or cut music education. The district valued music education and the cooperation of stakeholders helped support and maintain the music program. Major emphasizes there must be a balance between funding what the schools are required to provide and what the stakeholders expect. Districts may need to find “unconventional solutions” to funding issues. This article supports how districts can ensure they can keep a high-quality music program even when there are budget cuts.

Equity

While budget cuts cause negative impacts on music education, these cuts impact schools with students of color or from lower socioeconomic neighborhoods more than schools with a majority White population or higher economic areas. Many studies support all students do not have equal access to quality music education in the United States.

Access to music education in American schools is inconsistent, with significant disparities influenced by school demographics, particularly in lower-income and racially diverse districts. Shaw and Auletto (2022) stated “Access to music education in American schools is not guaranteed” (p. 1). The study examined equity in access to music education in Michigan’s

schools, focusing on how school demographics influenced the availability of music programs. They found disparities, particularly in lower-income and racially diverse districts, where students often had limited access to music education due to systemic inequalities. The study emphasized the need for policy changes to improve music education opportunities in underfunded schools, contributing to ongoing discussions about equity in public school arts programs.

The inequities in music education highlighted in the Declaration on Equity in Music for City Students reveal challenges that educators face in advocating for their programs amid funding struggles. Berman's (2018) review of the Declaration on Equity in Music for City Students stated the Declaration draws attention to the inequities in music education and can help music educators advocate for their programs. Berman found large school districts struggled with funding for music education and the principals of each school decided if they offered music at their school. Principals may not have much experience having music in their school to understand the importance. "The Declaration is rooted in music education access as a matter of social justice" (p. 36).

Schools serving low-income families often receive inadequate funding, leading to limited access to music education compared to wealthier districts. Chingos and Blagg (2017) showed schools with low-income families are not receiving as much funding as they should. Nichols (2020) also found that lower socioeconomic areas do not have the same access to education as wealthier school districts. Rickels and Stauffer (2010) found music education in Mesa, AZ is considered "effective" based on the offerings of music classes. However, music classes are less accessible to low-income students because it costs money to be in the music programs. Music education is effective and should be equitable and accessible.

Research shows that non-White students are less likely to receive music instruction, emphasizing the disparities in music education opportunities based on student demographics. Salvador and Allegood (2014) studied the differences between music programs offered in two public schools with similar demographics. “The purpose of our study was to investigate differences between music programs offered in public schools in the Detroit, Michigan, and Washington, DC, metropolitan areas with regard to the proportion of non-white student enrolment in the school” (p. 83). They found that non-White students were less likely to have music instruction. This study was truly relevant to my research because it looked at data showing which students receive music instruction and which do not.

To address the achievement gap between low-income students and their wealthier peers, it is crucial to tackle the educational disparities stemming from limited resources and inadequate support systems. An article by Van der Klaauw (2008) explored strategies to close the achievement gap between low-income students and their wealthier peers. It identified limited resources, inadequate support systems, and educational disparities as key factors contributing to the gap. The article advocated for equitable funding, investment in early childhood education, and prioritizing quality teacher recruitment in low-income schools. The article stressed the importance of addressing both academic and non-academic factors to ensure equal educational opportunities for students in poverty.

A study examined the state of elementary music education in one California county. It explored programs across varied demographics, including high and low socioeconomic status areas and urban, suburban, town, and rural settings. The key findings showed that many younger elementary students (TK through third grade) receive little or no music instruction. The study highlights that districts fall short of the National Association for Music Education's (NAfME

2022) guidelines, which recommend 90 minutes of weekly music instruction by qualified teachers. Only one district met this standard, and most fall significantly below the instructional minute recommendations. Rural districts especially struggle to provide music education, with 80% of surveyed rural districts offering no music instruction at any grade level (Sooter, 2023).

Engagement in music activities declines as elementary students progress in grade levels, with socioeconomic status and racial disparities affecting the amount of instruction received. A study by Miksza and Gault (2014), explores the engagement of elementary school students in music activities, revealing a decline in frequency as grade levels increase. Socioeconomic status influences instructional time, favoring higher economic groups. Racial disparities are observed, with White students receiving more music instruction than Black students. The study emphasizes the importance of equitable, high-quality music education for all students, highlighting the impact of factors like grade level, urbanicity, SES, and race.

Social and Emotional Learning

Research shows social and emotional learning (SEL) is important for a child's academic success. Students who display these strategies are more likely to be successful academically and in the workplace. These strategies are often used in music classes as students are working together to create something beautiful. If students do not learn the SEL skills, they are likely to interfere with academic learning (Responsive Classroom, 2016). This section of the literature review shows the importance of music education and SEL in rural and urban school settings.

Kennedy (2019) advocates for a leadership approach that prioritizes equity and care, particularly for diverse learners from marginalized backgrounds. Kennedy argues that SEL initiatives should be designed to meet the unique social, emotional, and cultural needs of all students, ensuring that no group is excluded from SEL benefits.

SEL is naturally occurring in music classes (Varner, 2020). Students use SEL strategies when working together to compose a piece of music. They learn to describe emotions when discussing how a piece of music made them feel. They practice self-management when they must wait for their turn to play their instrument or to be “it” in the singing game. They practice using kind words when peer-reviewing another classmate’s composition. Music aids in emotional regulation and behavioral development, offering an outlet for self-expression and reducing stress, which positively impacts classroom behavior and relationships (Dugar, 2023).

Edgar (2017) used a model that divides students into groups of different needs, indicated prevention (5% of students), target prevention (15% of students), and universal prevention (80% of students). The indicated prevention students receive individualized mental health and behavior intervention. Students with target prevention show they are at risk and receive an intensive intervention. The universal prevention group receives school-wide classroom instruction with skills in effective social and emotional learning. Edgar exclaims “We all need SEL instruction!”

Music lessons are full of social and emotional learning! Rural schools often run the risk of losing their music classes due to low enrollment and lack of funding, if they ever had music classes at all. Clark (2022) met with a focus group of parents who were worried about losing music for their children. They described music as bringing emotional learning back into the school. They stated that music shows emotion and gives the children an opportunity for self-expression. “So, without thinking, by removing music, [policy makers are] causing all these ... social problems in our children. So, let’s teach kids, [whether] talented or not, how to express themselves in a positive way through music” (Clark, 2022, p. 5).

An Early Childhood Longitudinal Study studied Kindergarteners from rural areas are no different than non-rural when it comes to social-emotional health. However, rural children do not

have as much access to early childhood programs that include mental health services (Zazlo et al., 2005). According to this study, 45.3% of rural kindergarteners were more likely to show social competence compared to 41.9% of non-rural children.

Typically, rural communities are far away from physical and mental health services and do not have public transportation to and from these services. Families may also be reluctant to seek mental health services due to the perceived stigma and reluctance to get help from outsiders (Clopton and Knesting, 2006). Rural children are more likely to live in poverty and they have poor access to early and preventative mental health services (Zazlo et al., 2005).

More research studies have been completed on the impact of SEL in urban areas. Typically, urban students are known to be of lower socioeconomic status, come from difficult home life, and are in overcrowded schools with not enough resources. Other struggles found in the urban community include unequal school funding, inadequate resources, homelessness, high levels of poverty, and varying levels of parent and family involvement (Milner et al., 2015). SEL is used to help these students find ways to cope with their situations in positive ways.

Studies have shown that punishment-based behavior does not work. McCallops and colleagues (2019) proposed long-term SEL interventions are needed to support urban students and they should be based on the student's strengths instead of deficits. McCallops and colleagues (2019) stated, "These interventions do not only meet students' needs but also acknowledge and build on their strengths and the strengths of their families and the urban community." Their study also emphasizes the need to include culturally responsive instruction along with SEL strategies.

SEL supports academic learning and success, however, the literature rarely considers the race-related stress students of color encounter (Griffin et al., 2022). SEL is criticized for using a color-blind perspective while not considering racism and the race-related stress children of color

deal with within school and in their community (Gregory and Fergus, 2017). Yet, it is found students in urban schools are more likely to have higher GPAs over time when they develop a greater sense of awareness of racism (Seider et al., 2019). When self-management strategies are used to cope with racism and race-related stressors, these strategies can help the student adjust academically (Griffin, et.al., 2022). Griffin and colleagues (2022) state:

Our findings indicate that racialized self-awareness supports feelings of belonging in schools for Black students. When Black students experience race-related stress, their attempts to address the roots of such issues must be supported by teachers and administrators in positions of power. Our data suggest that this will support equity-elaborated conceptualization of SEL as a meaningful strategy to help promote positive academic outcomes for Black students despite the deleterious effects of racism and racial discrimination in urban schools (p. 216).

Music education is just as important to the SEL of urban students as it is to students in rural areas. John, Cameron, and Bartel (2016) completed a study about musical play in an urban community school. They said, “Music is a distinct form of communication that manifests naturally when children are engaged in musical play regardless of their cultural backgrounds.” They found musical play promoted social and emotional development. They found the students were able to self-regulate by being calm and focused, attentive to others, and co-regulating with others.

Schools’ primary mission is academic instruction; however, they are becoming more responsible for helping students with their social and emotional needs (Meyers et al., 2015). It does not matter if a child lives in an urban or rural environment, all children need to learn self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social

awareness through social-emotional instruction (CASEL, 2022). As students work on these skills, oftentimes their academic learning also benefits.

By participating in structured music activities, children can develop their attention, manage stress, and become more aware of their thoughts and emotions. Music provides a natural, engaging way for children to practice mindfulness, promoting cognitive and emotional development (Auerbach and Delport, 2018).

Totan and colleagues (2013) found that “positive social behaviors positively affect students’ social and emotional learning needs and skills positively, whereas negative social behaviors negatively affect them regardless of living situation” (p. 49). It is easy for teachers and administrators to dole out punishment, but what are they doing to get to the root of the behavior? What are they doing to prevent negative behaviors from happening in the first place? This is where SEL is important. SEL can help students heal and learn positive social behaviors. Once students have social awareness, then academic learning can truly begin.

In the music classroom, making music is a social activity that emphasizes self-awareness and social awareness (Edgar, 2017). Edgar (2017) stated, “Social-emotional learning and music education, taken together, gives us an opportunity to prepare our students to be skilled musicians, emotionally aware people, and socially adept members of community” (p. 122).

In summary, the literature highlights significant disparities in access to music education based on socioeconomic status and race, revealing a concerning trend of underfunded programs in schools serving lower-income and racially diverse populations. Research underscores the critical role music education plays in fostering social and emotional learning (SEL), providing students with vital skills that contribute to academic success and personal development. There is a need for more focused studies that investigate the effectiveness of music education

interventions in diverse settings and their role in supporting SEL for marginalized groups. This study aims to explore access to elementary music education across various demographics and median incomes in the Southeast.

Chapter 3

Methods and Procedures

The purpose of this descriptive quantitative study was to describe access to elementary music education based on the demographics and median income of twelve major cities in six states within the Southeastern United States. My first step was to ask if this study was considered non-human-subjects data by Auburn University Internal Review Board (IRB). I submitted a determination form, and they agreed that this study was non-human-subjects because I would use deidentified, publicly-available, preexisting data. The Auburn University IRB also agreed that I could call schools to ask for specific data, if needed.

Study Data

I collected data from twelve cities in six states in the Southeastern United States. These included Birmingham and Huntsville, Alabama; Fayetteville and Little Rock, Arkansas; Jacksonville and Miami, Florida; Atlanta and Augusta, Georgia; Gulfport and Jackson, Mississippi; and Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee. I chose these states because they are the states that surround my home state of Alabama. I wanted to see if my nearby states had similar data to mine.

I examined city and state websites to see which schools were included in each metropolitan area. Specific data for this study included the presence of a music teacher collected from each school's website and emails to district and school administrators. Finally, I retrieved the demographics of each school from the National Center for Education Statistics online database (NCES, 2023).

I also retrieved the Title 1 status of each school from the state's Department of Education websites. I used the Alabama Federal Program's website (ALSDE, 2024), Arkansas Department

of Education 2022-2023 Title I Status List (ARSDE, 2023), Florida Department of Education Title I School Lists (FLDOE, 2023), List of Georgia Title I Schools (GADOE, 2023), Mississippi Department of Education Title I Schools (MSDOE, 2023), and state of Tennessee Title I list (TNDOE, 2023).

The federal Title I program aims to close the achievement gap for students from low-income families by providing targeted financial support. Title I funds are allocated to schools based on the percentage of low-income students enrolled, with higher concentrations of such students leading to more financial assistance. These funds are used to improve academic outcomes, particularly in reading and math, through interventions like hiring additional teachers, offering tutoring, and purchasing instructional materials. Title I supports both schoolwide programs, which offer flexibility in improving overall school performance, and targeted assistance programs, which focus on specific student groups at risk of falling behind.

Additionally, schools receiving Title I funds are held accountable for demonstrating progress in student achievement, with potential interventions if they fail to meet performance standards. Overall, Title I plays a crucial role in reducing educational inequality and ensuring that disadvantaged students have access to the necessary resources to succeed academically (US Department of Education, 2015).

Data Collection

While collecting data from the schools, I gathered specific demographic information using publicly available data sources. I collected each school's demographic data from the National Center for Education Statistics online database (NCES, 2023). I collected the median household income of each school's zip code from the United States Census website (US Census,

2022). The demographic data included the number of enrolled students, the number and percentage of students by race, and the school's Title I status.

I collected data from public school districts in eleven major cities. My data search began by checking district and school website directories to determine if each school has a music teacher. If the website did not provide this information, I looked for contact email addresses and phone numbers. I then emailed district leaders, school administrators, or office staff to inquire if their school had a music teacher. Additionally, I contacted several elementary music teacher colleagues to ask how many schools within their district have a music teacher and how many do not. Finally, I called some school districts and schools directly to ask if they had a music teacher. This study does not use any names or quotations from human subjects.

Data Analysis

I used descriptive statistics to describe the demographics of schools that have music teachers and those that do not. I also used Chi-square to evaluate the relationship between student demographic data and whether or not the school had a music teacher. Data were entered into SPSS to calculate demographic statistics and the differences between schools with and without music teachers. I created a table to show a breakdown of school systems, including the number of schools, the number of music teachers, and the number of students of each race or ethnicity in the system (see Tables 3, 4, and 5).

I gathered data about each school from the National Center for Educational Statistics website, which provides specific demographic data for individual schools through their table generator (NCES, 2023). The only data not reported by NCES that were needed for this study was whether individual schools have music educators. I searched each school's or system's public website to find this information. If I could not locate it there, I called each school to

inquire if they have a music educator. NCES reports very specific demographic data, including school-specific locations, school websites, and school phone numbers. All specific school collected data were recorded as anonymous.

A school receives Title I funds from the federal government if 40 percent of students are from low-income families (U.S. Department of Education, 2015; NCES, 2023). Title I funds for schoolwide programs are designed to help the entire school’s education program improve achievement for all students (NCES, 2023). I used the data to determine how many Title I schools had a music teacher and how many did not. Additionally, I entered the median household income (MHI) for each school into SPSS. I categorized the MHI data, labeling all MHI under \$60,000 as 1 and all MHI over \$61,001 as 2. Then, I used descriptive statistics and crosstabs to compare the presence of music teachers in schools with MHI over \$60,001 and under \$60,000.

Table 1

Data Analysis Plan

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>How I will Collect Data to Answer the Research Question</i>	<i>Type of Data (nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio, qualitative interview, field notes, etc.)</i>	<i>Data Analysis Procedures</i>	<i>Hypothesized Findings</i>
How many schools in the selected geographic area have a music teacher?	District and school websites. Email and/or call school leaders or colleagues.	Quantitative Nominal	Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies Percentages	Most schools will have a music teacher while a few will not.
What are the differences between specific demographic groups based on having a music teacher, or not having a music teacher?	National Center for Educational Statistics website	Quantitative Nominal Scale	Chi-square	Schools with high SES and predominantly White schools will be more likely to have a music teacher than low SES and students of color.

Reliability, Validity, and Potential Bias

Reliability means that results are consistent over time and accurately represent the whole group being studied. If similar results can be repeated with the same methods, the research tool is reliable (Joppe, 2000, Williams et al., 2022). The research data were reliable because any researcher would find the same demographic numbers and the same number of music teachers per school district based on the local, state, and national databases I accessed, and individual phone calls I made when necessary.

Heale and Twycross (2015) define validity as “the extent to which a concept is accurately measured in a quantitative study” (p. 1). Validity shows whether the research actually measures what it’s supposed to or how accurate the results are (Joppe, 2000, Williams et al., 2022). I checked the validity of the research by clearly analyzing the data I collected and specifying ahead of time the statistical methods and other analytical approaches I used. I acknowledge my potential biases in my study because I want every school to have a music teacher regardless of demographics. However, I made sure to only use the data to reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis. I interpreted the results of the research and discussed any unexpected findings.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this descriptive quantitative study was to describe access to elementary music education based on the demographics and median income of twelve major cities in six states within the Southeastern United States.

Research Question 1. How Many Schools in The Selected Geographic Area Have Elementary Music Teachers?

Tennessee and Arkansas have laws stating that every elementary school must provide music education to their students. Arkansas's (2023) law states that student must receive 40 minutes of music instruction taught by a qualified music teacher. I also found that all schools in the two areas of Georgia had music teachers in 100% of its elementary schools.

One metropolitan area of Alabama had music teachers in all schools, but the teachers were only in each school for one semester out of the year. The other major metropolitan area of Alabama used in this study varied by school district. Some districts had music in every elementary school, some had music in most of their schools and a few smaller school districts did not have any elementary music teachers.

In one area of Mississippi, all smaller school districts have music in all elementary schools, as confirmed by the individual school websites. However, the arts supervisor of one larger district said that they do not have music in any of their elementary schools. In another area, all school districts had music in all of their schools except for one school district. That district had music in 78% of its schools.

I was unable to obtain data from two major metropolitan areas in Florida and could only access data from one. In Florida, each county is served by a single large school district. The district I accessed had elementary music teachers in 79% of its schools.

Table 2 shows the total number of elementary schools in each major metropolitan area (*n*) and the number of schools who have a music teacher, the number of schools who do not have a music teacher, and the percentage of schools with music teachers.

Table 2

Percentage of Schools with Elementary Music Teachers

<i>State</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Has music</i>	<i>No music</i>	<i>%</i>
Alabama	Birmingham	96	84	12	87.5
	Huntsville	41	41	0	100
Arkansas	Fayetteville	38	38	0	100
	Little Rock	53	53	0	100
Georgia	Atlanta	370	370	0	100
	Athens	48	48	0	100
Florida	Jackson	118	92	26	79
	Miami	48	N.d.*	N.d.*	N.d.*
Mississippi	Gulfport	31	15	16	50
	Jackson	59	52	7	88.3
Tennessee	Memphis	136	136	0	100
	Nashville	177	177	0	100

Note. Data unavailable*

Data in Table 3 provides a snapshot of 137 schools in Alabama, highlighting differences in demographics, resources, and socioeconomic factors. Most schools have a music teacher and Title 1 status, indicating federal support for low-income students. Household income varies significantly, with an average of \$70,711, affecting available resources. Total student enrollment averages 516.5 students, with a student-teacher ratio of 17.5.

Black and Hispanic students are more prominently represented than other groups, while American Indian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Asian students are less represented. White students, while widely represented, are not the majority in all districts. These statistics illustrate a landscape of diverse student bodies and variable resources that impact educational opportunities across schools.

Table 3

Alabama Demographic Statistics

Variable	N		M	Mdn	SD	Var.	Min.	Max.
	Val.	Miss.						
Has a music teacher	137	1	0.9	1	0.3	0.1	0	1
Title 1 status	137	1	0.7	1	0.5	0.2	0	1
Median household income	136	2	70711.1	68950	30440.1	926601110.6	23273	151550
MHI above or below \$60,000	136	2	1.6	2	0.5	0.2	1	2
Total number of students enrolled	137	1	516.5	503	191.5	36669.7	94	1350
Number of American Indian students	137	1	3.3	1	8.7	75.6	0	57
Percentage of American Indian students	137	1	0.01	0.001	0.02	0	0	0.1
Number of Asian students	137	1	8.1	2	16.0	256.0	0	93
Percentage of Asian students	137	1	0.01	0.005	0.03	0.001	0	0.1
Number of Hispanic students	137	1	60.9	42	58.8	3462.9	0	338
Percentage of Hispanic students	137	1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.01	0	0.6
Number of Black students	137	1	223.7	203	170.0	28903.5	0	707
Percentage of Black students	137	1	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.1	0	1
Majority or Minority Black Students	134	4	1.4	1	0.5	0.2	1	2
Number of White students	137	1	198.1	134	210.6	44367.8	0	992

Percentage of White students	137	1	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.1	0	1
Majority or Minority White Students	136	2	1.4	1	0.5	0.2	1	2
Number of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Students	137	1	0.7	0	1.4	2.0	0	7
Percentage of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students	137	1	0.001	0	0.003	0	0	0.02
Number of students of two or more races	137	1	21.8	16	19.3	373.1	0	88
Percentage of students of two or more races	137	1	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.001	0	0.2
Percentage of non-white students	137	1	0.6	0.7	0.3	0.1	0.03	1
Majority or Minority Non-white students	136	2	1.6	2	0.5	0.2	1	2
Number of full-time teaching units	137	1	30.0	29.1	11.8	139.9	7	84
Student to teacher ratio	137	1	17.5	17.7	2.5	6.0	11.8	25.3

Table 4 offers a profile of 119 schools in Duvall County, Florida, examining student demographics, teaching resources, and socioeconomic factors. Nearly all schools have Title 1 status, suggesting widespread federal support for low-income students, and around 80% have a music teacher. Median household income varies widely, averaging \$63,584.50, which could influence educational funding and resources. The average school enrolls 532.2 students, with a student-teacher ratio of 17.2, providing a moderate level of access to educators.

Diversity among students is notable, with Black and Hispanic students representing substantial proportions across the district. On average, Black students make up 40% and Hispanic students 20% of the student body, while American Indian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Asian students are less represented. White students, while widely present, do not form a majority in every school.

Table 4*Florida Demographic Statistics*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Var.</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
	<i>Val.</i>	<i>Miss.</i>						
Has a music teacher	119	0	0.8	1	0.4	0.167	0	1
Title 1 status	119	0	0.7	1	0.5	0.209	0	1
Median household income	119	0	63584.5	61536	18884.8	356636035.3	28534	109375
MHI above or below \$60,000	119	0	1.5	2	0.5	0.252	1	2
Total number of students enrolled	119	0	532.2	483	263.8	69606.385	80	1368
Number of American Indian students	119	0	2.7	2	3.0	8.8	0	19
Percentage of American Indian students	119	0	0.005	0.004	0.005	0	0	0.03
Number of Asian students	119	0	23.6	9	39.4	1551.2	0	315
Percentage of Asian students	119	0	0.0	0.02	0.1	0.003	0	0.5
Number of Hispanic students	119	0	93.5	67	82.3	6781.2	1	361
Percentage of Hispanic students	119	0	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.01	0.01	0.5
Number of Black students	119	0	204.3	161	139.2	19370.9	17	739
Percentage of Black students	119	0	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.08	0.03	0.99
Majority or Minority Black Students	119	0	1.4	1	0.5	0.2	1	2
Number of White students	119	0	172.6	116	154.8	23971.706	0	606
Percentage of White students	119	0	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.04	0	0.8
Majority or Minority White Students	118	1	1.2	1	0.4	0.1	1	2
Number of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Students	119	0	1.6	1	1.8	3.2	0	9
Percentage of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students	119	0	0.0	0.002	0.003	0	0	0.01
Number of students of two or more races	119	0	34.1	30	23.7	559.5	0	110
Percentage of students of two or more races	119	0	0.1	0.06	0.03	0.001	0	0.2
Percentage of non-white students	119	0	0.7	0.7	0.2	0.04	0.3	1
Majority or Minority Non-white students	119	0	1.8	2	0.4	0.1	1	2
Number of full-time teaching units	119	0	31.8	30	15.6	243.6	4	82
Student to teacher ratio	119	0	17.2	16.4	4.0	15.7	6.9	35.5

Table 5 offers an analysis of 90 schools in two areas of Mississippi, covering demographic diversity, socioeconomic factors, and teaching resources. Approximately 80% of districts have both Title 1 status and a music teacher, suggesting broad support for low-income students and some access to arts education. Household incomes vary significantly, with an average of \$59,865.90, close to the \$60,000 mark, potentially impacting resource allocation. The average enrollment per district is 474.6 students, with a student-teacher ratio of 13.3, indicating a relatively low ratio and better access to instructional support compared to other areas.

Black students are the largest minority group, making up about 50% of the student body on average, while Hispanic students are present at lower percentages, and Asian, American Indian, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students have smaller representations. White students are commonly represented but are not the majority in all schools, and in many, non-White students form the majority population. Overall, this data shows a diverse demographic makeup and varying resource availability, shaping educational opportunities differently across schools.

Table 5

Mississippi Demographic Statistics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Var.</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
	<i>Val.</i>	<i>Miss.</i>						
Has a music teacher	90	0	0.8	1	0.4	0.2	0	1
Title 1 status	90	0	0.8	1	0.4	0.2	0	1
Median household income	89	1	59865.9	60198	23923.4	572327347.4	26250	123606
MHI above or below \$60,000	89	1	1.5	2	0.5	0.3	1	2
Total number of students enrolled	90	0	474.6	450	207.0	42850.3	34	1060
Number of American Indian students	90	0	0.7	0	1.4	2.0	0	7
Percentage of American Indian students	90	0	0.001	0	0.004	0	0	0.04
Number of Asian students	90	0	10.0	2	18.1	326.3	0	121
Percentage of Asian students	90	0	0.0	0.01	0.0	0.001	0	0.12

Number of Hispanic students	90	0	27.3	12	35.1	1235.2	0	172
Percentage of Hispanic students	90	0	0.1	0.02	0.1	0.0	0	0.3
Number of Black students	90	0	223.1	220	141.2	19938.7	6	763
Percentage of Black students	90	0	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.02	1
Majority or Minority Black Students	90	0	1.5	2	0.5	0.3	1	2
Number of White students	90	0	186.6	131	189.2	35797.5	0	776
Percentage of White students	90	0	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.1	0	0.9
Majority or Minority White Students	89	1	1.3	1	0.5	0.2	1	2
Number of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Students	90	0	0.6	0	1.4	1.9	0	8
Percentage of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students	90	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0.02
Number of students of two or more races	90	0	26.3	18	23.0	529.3	0	91
Percentage of students of two or more races	90	0	0.1	0.05	0.04	0.002	0	0.2
Percentage of non-white students	90	0	0.7	0.7	0.3	0.1	0.1	1
Majority or Minority Non-white students	90	0	1.7	2	0.5	0.2	1	2
Number of full-time teaching units	90	0	35.1	33.9	13.7	188.1	5.2	74.3
Student to teacher ratio	90	0	13.3	13.4	2.0	3.9	6.5	17.7

Research Question 2. What Are the Differences Between Specific Demographic Groups Based on Having a Music Teacher, or Not Having a Music Teacher?

The null hypothesis states that there will be no significant differences between specific demographic groups based on the presence or absence of a music teacher. Arkansas, Georgia, and Tennessee had music teachers in every school in the studied metropolitan areas. According to Cronk (2008), “A significant Chi-square test indicates that the data vary from the expected values. A test that is not significant indicates that the data are consistent with the expected values” (p. 118). A Chi-square test of independence was conducted at a 0.05 significance level to evaluate the relationship between student demographic data and whether or not the school had

a music teacher in two metropolitan areas of Alabama and Mississippi and one large area of Florida.

What Differences Exist Between Students of Different Races or Ethnicities?

The study focused on two major metropolitan areas in Alabama: Birmingham/Jefferson and Huntsville/Madison, encompassing 137 schools across 17 districts. Among these, 94 schools employed a music teacher, while 25 did not. Notably, of the 25 schools without a music teacher, 19 had a majority Black student population, all 25 had a majority of students of color, and none had a predominantly White student body.

A Chi-square test of independence was calculated to evaluate the relationship between the demographics of a school and the presence of a music teacher in two large metropolitan areas of Alabama. No significant relationship was found between schools with a majority of Black students (51% or more) in the two large metropolitan areas of Alabama, $\chi^2(1, N = 137) = .52, p = .82$. No significant relationship was found between schools with a majority of White students in the two large metropolitan areas of Alabama $\chi^2(1, N = 137) = .67, p = .41$. No significant relationship was found between schools with a majority of students of color in the two large metropolitan areas of Alabama $\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 0.58, p = .45$. This indicates that we fail to reject the null because there is no relationship between demographics of the schools examined in Alabama and whether or not a music teacher was present.

In Florida, I examined a large school district in the Jacksonville/Duval County area, which included 119 schools. Of these, 94 schools had a music teacher, while 25 did not. Fifty-one of the schools had a majority Black student population, and 19 of those lacked a music teacher. Additionally, all 25 schools without a music teacher had a majority of students of color. Notably, every school with a majority White population had a music teacher.

A Chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing whether the demographics of a school and the presence of a music teacher in a large metropolitan area of Florida. A significant relationship was found between schools with a majority of Black students (51% or more) in this area of Florida $\chi^2(1, N = 119) = 14.20, p < .001$. A significant relationship was found between schools with a majority of White students in this area of Florida $\chi^2(1, N = 119) = 5.71, p = .02$. We reject the null because a significant relationship was found between schools with a majority of students of color in this area of Florida $\chi^2(1, N = 119) = 6.01, p = .01$. This indicates that any of the demographics studied (Black, White, or students of color) may or may not have a music teacher.

The two major metropolitan areas studied in Mississippi, Jackson and Gulfport, included 90 schools in total. Of these, 46 schools had a majority Black student population, with 9 lacking a music teacher. In schools with a majority White population, 9 also did not have a music teacher. Additionally, across all 90 schools with a majority of students of color, 13 lacked a music teacher.

A Chi-square test of independence was calculated to evaluate the relationship between the demographics of a school and the presence of a music teacher in two large metropolitan areas of Mississippi. No significant relationship was found between schools with a majority of Black students (51% or more) in the two large metropolitan areas of Mississippi $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = 1.21, p = .27$. No significant relationship was found between schools with a majority of White students in the two large metropolitan areas of Mississippi $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = 0.92, p = .34$. No significant relationship was found between schools with a majority of students of color in the two large metropolitan areas of Mississippi $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = .75, p = .37$. This indicates that we fail to

reject the null because there is not a signification relationship between the demographics of the schools examined in Mississippi and whether or not a music teacher was present.

What differences exist based on household income?

I compared groups of schools based on zip codes with a median household income (MHI) above \$60,000 and below \$60,000. I chose \$60,000 as the cut off because the median household income in Alabama was \$60,000 (United States Census, 2022). A total of 78 schools were in zip codes with an MHI above \$60,000, while 58 schools were in areas with an MHI below \$60,000. Among the higher-income group, 7 schools lacked a music teacher, compared to 5 schools in the lower-income group.

A Chi-square test of independence was calculated to evaluate the relationship between the median household income of a school's zip code and the presence of a music teacher. No significant relationship was found between schools with a median household income of less than \$60,000 in the two large metropolitan areas of Alabama $\chi^2(1, N = 137) = .05, p = .94$. This indicates that we fail to reject the null because there is no relationship between the median household income of the schools examined and whether or not a music teacher was present.

In Duvall County, Florida 62 schools were in zip codes with an MHI above \$60,000, while 57 schools were in areas with an MHI below \$60,000. Among the higher-income group, 7 schools lacked a music teacher, compared to 18 schools in the lower-income group.

A Chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing whether there was a relationship between the median household income of a school's zip code and the presence of a music teacher. A significant relationship was found between schools with a median household income of less than \$60,000 in a large metropolitan area of Florida $\chi^2(1, N = 119) = 7.37, p=.01$. This indicates that we reject the null because there is a significant relationship between the

median household income of the schools examined in Florida and whether or not a music teacher was present.

In Mississippi, 46 schools were in zip codes with an MHI above \$60,000, while 43 schools were in areas with an MHI below \$60,000. Among the higher-income group, 13 schools lacked a music teacher, compared to 9 schools in the lower-income group.

A Chi-square test of independence was calculated to evaluate the relationship between the median household income of a school's zip code and the presence of a music teacher. No significant relationship was found between schools with a median household income of less than \$60,000 in the two large metropolitan areas of Mississippi $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = .64, p = .42$. This indicates that we fail to reject the null because there is no relationship between the median household income of the schools examined in Mississippi and whether or not a music teacher was present.

What Differences Exist Based on Whether the School Was a Title I School?

In the Alabama areas studied, 91 out of 137 schools received Title I funding. Of these 91 schools, only 8 did not have a music teacher. A Chi-square test of independence was calculated to evaluate the relationship between the Title I status of a school and the presence of a music teacher. No significant relationship was found between schools that receive Title I funding in the two large metropolitan areas of Alabama $\chi^2(1, N = 137) = .00, p = .99$. This indicates that we fail to reject the null because there is no relationship between the Title I status of the schools examined in Alabama and whether or not a music teacher was present.

In Duval County, Florida, 84 schools receive Title I funding, and 22 of these schools do not have a music teacher. A Chi-square test of independence was calculated to evaluate the relationship between the Title I status of a school and the presence of a music teacher. A

significant relationship was found between schools that receive Title I funding in a large metropolitan area of Florida $\chi^2(1, N = 119) = 4.62, p = .03$. This indicates that we reject the null because there is a significant relationship between the Title I status of the schools examined in Florida and whether or not a music teacher was present.

In Mississippi, 68 schools received Title I funding, and 21 of these schools do not have a music teacher. Only 1 school that does not receive Title I funding lacked a music teacher. A Chi-square test of independence was calculated to evaluate the relationship between the Title I status of a school and the presence of a music teacher. A significant relationship was found between schools that receive Title I funding in the two large metropolitan areas of Mississippi $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = 6.24, p = 0.01$. This indicates that we reject the null because there is significant relationship between the Title I status of the schools examined in Mississippi and whether or not a music teacher was present.

Summary

Data collected as part of this study did not support the thought that White students and students who live in higher socioeconomic areas in this of the Southeast may be more likely to have access to elementary music education than students of color, or students who live in lower socioeconomic areas. Arkansas, Georgia, and Tennessee had music in all of their schools, and Alabama did not show a relationship between demographics and the presence of a music teacher.

Florida was an outlier in that schools with a household income of $< \$59,999$ were significantly less likely to have a music teacher than schools with a MHI of $> \$60,000$. Mississippi also showed a significant relationship between schools that receive Title I funding. Schools in the two major metropolitan areas of Mississippi showed that schools that receive Title I funding are less likely to have a music teacher than schools that do not receive Title I funding.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the presence or absence of a music teacher varied between specific demographic groups across different metropolitan areas in Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida, with a focus on race/ethnicity, median household income, and Title I status. The null hypothesis indicated that no significant differences would exist between these groups based on the presence or absence of a music teacher. This discussion will explore the findings related to each demographic factor and discuss the implications for equity in access to music education.

How Many Schools in the Selected Geographic Area Have Elementary Music Teachers?

This study examined the availability of music education across elementary schools in various metropolitan areas of Tennessee, Arkansas, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida. The findings highlight significant regional differences in access to music education. Some areas provided music education to all of their schools while in other areas, there appeared to be equity gaps based on school and/or student demographic variables. A 2020 study by Elpus on arts education access in the United States revealed that school size plays a significant role in determining the number of arts education classes offered. Additionally, Elpus noted "a clear association between the socioeconomic status of students attending a school and the availability of arts education at the school" (Elpus, 2020, p. 66).

In Tennessee and Arkansas, state laws require that all elementary schools provide music education, resulting in universal access to music teachers in every school studied. Tennessee Code (2014) states, "The course of instruction in all public schools for kindergarten through grade eight (K-8) shall include art and music education to help each student foster creative

thinking, spatial learning, discipline, craftsmanship and the intrinsic rewards of hard work” (TN Code, 2014). Arkansas Code (2023) states:

A public elementary school in the state shall provide instruction for at least forty (40) minutes, as determined by the superintendent of the school district, in visual art and at least forty (40) minutes, as determined by the superintendent of the school district, in music based on the state visual art and music frameworks each calendar week of the school year or an equivalent amount of time in each school year (AR Code, 2024).

This legislative support ensures that students in these states consistently have access to music instruction as part of their elementary education, regardless of the specific school district or location. The consistency of this mandate likely contributes to a more equitable distribution of arts education and suggests that state-level policies can play a critical role in ensuring access to music education.

Similarly, in Georgia, 100% of the elementary schools studied employed music teachers. Georgia’s *Quality Basic Education Funding Formula* (GADOE, 1991) includes money allocated for “subject specialists” in first through fifth grades naming art and music.

The availability of music teachers in Alabama and Mississippi varied widely depending on the specific school district. In one metropolitan area of Alabama, music teachers were present in every school, but only for one semester each year. This arrangement may limit the depth and continuity of music education, raising concerns about whether students receive sufficient in-school exposure to the arts. In the second Alabama metropolitan area, access to music education varied by district, with some districts offering music in all schools and others entirely lacking music programs.

In Mississippi, a similar pattern of variability was observed. Smaller school districts in one metropolitan area consistently provided music education in all schools, while a larger district did not offer music in any of its elementary schools. In another Mississippi area, one district lacked music in 22% of its schools, while all other districts provided universal access. In Florida, I was able to obtain data from only one major metropolitan area, where music teachers were present in 79% of elementary schools.

It is important to point out that in Alabama, arts teachers are not included as “teaching units” and these educators’ salaries must be made up through local funding sources (which generally include area taxes). This is a strong possible reason for the equity gaps seen in the Alabama districts in this study. The *Guide to State Allocation Calculations 2023-2024* by the Alabama Department of Education (2023) explains how unit allocations are determined for schools. The document includes school administrators (principals and assistant principals), counselors, librarians, and classroom teacher units. The document does not mention units allocated for arts education.

Similarly, the *2023-24 Funding for Florida School Districts* (FLDOE, 2023b) document provides an overview of school district funding. Music and arts education are not mentioned in this document. Mississippi’s *Teacher Unit Allocation Methodology* (2024) also does not mention music or arts education.

What Are the Differences Between Specific Demographic Groups Based on Having a Music Teacher, or Not Having a Music Teacher?

Should all elementary students have equal access to music education in their schools? The short answer is ‘yes.’ However, what this study demonstrates is that the ‘yes’ answer may be

clouded by demographics, funding, and location. Underfunding and resource shortages in low-income schools restrict access to qualified teachers and stable programs (Dugar, 2023).

In Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida, the relationship between school demographics and the presence of a music teacher had varied results. While no significant relationship was found in Alabama and Mississippi, the findings in Florida revealed a notable trend. Schools in Duval County, Florida, with a majority of Black students or students of color, were significantly less likely to have a music teacher compared to schools with a majority of White students, which always had a music teacher. This suggests that there may be a relationship between the demographics of a school and access to music education in at least some places in Florida.

What differences exist based on household income?

The analysis of the median household income in lower-income areas of Duval County were more likely to lack a music teacher than household income similarly showed regional differences. In Alabama and Mississippi, there was no relationship between the median household income of a school's zip code and whether a music teacher was present. In contrast, Florida's results revealed a significant relationship between income and access to music education. Schools located in lower-income areas of Duval County were more likely to lack a music teacher compared to schools in higher-income areas. While this study does not definitively state why some lower-income students do not have music in schools, it does provide evidence that income, at least in Duval County, may be a reason some students do not have access to music in their elementary schools.

What differences exist based on whether the school is a Title I school?

A clear link exists between the socioeconomic status of students at a school and the availability of arts education at that school (Elpus, 2020). The analysis of Title I status also

showed significant differences between regions. In Alabama, no significant relationship was found between Title I status and the presence of a music teacher, indicating that Title I funding may not directly influence music teacher placement in this region. In Florida and Mississippi, Title I schools were significantly less likely to have a music teacher. In Florida, 22 of the 84 Title I schools did not have a music teacher, while in Mississippi, 21 of the 68 Title I schools did not have a music teacher.

These results indicate that there is a significant relationship between the Title I status in both states and whether a school will have a music teacher. Should students in (some) Title I schools have less educational opportunities than those others in Title I schools? Philosophically, yes, they should. However, it seems at least with some of the schools in this study, music education was not included. This study cannot predict reasons for a gap, but it does demonstrate that a critical equity gap exists for some Title I students.

What's happening in Florida?

Shaw and Auletto (2022) argue that "Access to music education in American schools is not guaranteed" (p. 1). Their study on equity in music education in Michigan revealed disparities, particularly in low-income and racially diverse districts, where systemic inequalities limited access to music programs. The authors stressed the need for policy changes to enhance music education opportunities in underfunded schools, adding to ongoing discussions about equity in public school arts programs.

The results of this study revealed that Duval County's school district was similar to the study in Michigan because significant relationships were found between the absence of a music teacher and all three key factors examined: race and ethnicity, median household income (MHI), and Title I status.

Schools with a majority of Black students or students of color were more likely to lack a music teacher, with all 25 schools without a music teacher having a majority of students of color, while every school with a majority White population had one. Income disparities also play a role, as lower-income areas were significantly more likely to lack music teachers. Additionally, schools receiving Title I funding were less likely to have a music teacher, highlighting how economic disadvantages compound the inequities in music education access. Together, these findings indicate that Duval County was unique in that all three factors—race and ethnicity, income, and Title I status—are significantly correlated with the presence of a music teacher. This contrasts with other areas, where disparities may be evident but not necessarily in all three categories simultaneously.

How can we have music with no funding?

Some schools attempt to find ways to provide music when there is no funding for a qualified music teacher. Schools can create after-school music clubs. General classroom teachers can include music as part of their regular day. Volunteers and college students can go into schools to provide music instruction. However, these ideas still do not address the inequities in music education.

While after-school programs offer valuable opportunities, they often fail to provide equal access to music education, particularly for students from disadvantaged or under-resourced communities. Barriers such as limited availability, cost, and inadequate transportation can prevent low-income students from participating (Fusco, 2008). Even when programs are available, the quality of instruction can vary significantly due to relying on teachers without specialized training, especially in underfunded schools (Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008). Additionally, inconsistent funding limits the ability of these programs to provide high-quality

music education, further disadvantaging students in low-income areas (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009).

Relying on general classroom teachers to teach music often results in inadequate music education due to their lack of training, confidence, and resources. Many non-specialist teachers feel unequipped to teach music effectively, which often leads to limited instruction or music being given less importance in the curriculum (Russell-Bowie, 2009; Welch, 2020). Schools without dedicated music programs often lack proper instruments and materials, hindering teachers' ability to provide effective music education (Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008). As music is crucial for cognitive and emotional development, especially in early childhood, relying on non-specialists compromises students' opportunities to fully benefit from music education (Welch, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to invest in specialist music teachers to ensure high-quality music experiences for all students.

Having pre-service music education students from local colleges and universities teach in schools is a valuable way to give future educators hands-on experience before they lead their own music programs. However, this approach has drawbacks. Relying on inexperienced, rotating teachers can negatively impact the quality of music education for the children. First, their lack of experience often leads to inconsistent and lower-quality instruction, as they are still developing their teaching skills (Russell-Bowie, 2009). Schools that rely on such volunteers may overlook the need for qualified, full-time music teachers, thus undermining the stability and quality of music programs (Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008). This could lead nearby schools to adopt the same model, prioritizing cost savings over quality. If this trend grows, it may reduce job opportunities for qualified music teachers who have invested years and money in their degrees, as schools opt

for volunteers over professionals, creating a ripple effect that devalues the profession (Welch, 2020).

Why mention SEL?

Social and emotional learning is a crucial foundation for a child's academic success, as it equips students with the skills needed to manage emotions, build relationships, and focus on learning. Without SEL, students may struggle to fully engage in academic activities, which can negatively affect their overall development (Responsive Classroom, 2016). Given its importance, SEL initiatives must address the unique social, emotional, and cultural needs of all students to ensure equitable access to these benefits (Kennedy, 2019). Music education offers a natural and engaging platform for fostering SEL. Through structured music activities, students develop critical skills like emotional regulation, stress management, and mindfulness (Varner, 2020; Auerbach & Delport, 2018). However, disparities in access to music education, particularly in low-income schools, raise concerns about unequal opportunities to develop SEL through music.

Research shows SEL is important for a child's academic success. If students do not learn the SEL skills, they are likely to interfere with academic learning (Responsive Classroom, 2016). SEL initiatives should be designed to meet the unique social, emotional, and cultural needs of all students, ensuring that no group is excluded from SEL benefits (Kennedy, 2019).

SEL is naturally occurring in music classes (Varner, 2020). By participating in structured music activities, children can develop their attention, manage stress, and become more aware of their thoughts and emotions. Music provides a natural, engaging way for children to practice mindfulness, promoting cognitive and emotional development (Auerbach and Delport, 2018). Students who do not have music classes do not learn SEL through music. Therefore, it was

important to see who has access to music classes and who does not to see who is also not getting SEL through music.

Music education plays a critical role in fostering social-emotional skills among students (Davis, 2024). Structured music programs are shown to enhance key competencies such as empathy, self-awareness, teamwork, and resilience. Music should not be considered as a supplementary or non-essential subject because of its importance in holistic student development.

The connection between music education and social-emotional learning highlights their significant role in supporting mental health and facilitating trauma recovery (Lloyd, 2021). Trauma exposure has a strong impact on the mental and emotional health of low-income children, especially those with a history of maltreatment. Children who experience more trauma tend to face greater challenges in their development. This highlights the need for specific support to help these children recover and reduce the long-term effects of trauma (Rosen et al., 2018). If Title I schools and schools in lower income areas do not have access to music education, then those students also do not have access to SEL through music. This also goes back to the problem of schools not having equal access to a whole well-rounded education that includes SEL and music.

Music education and SEL are deeply interconnected, with music offering a powerful avenue for developing skills such as empathy, self-awareness, and resilience (Davis, 2024). The absence of music programs in Title I schools and low-income areas not only deprives students of music's educational benefits but also limits their access to SEL opportunities that support mental health and trauma recovery (Lloyd, 2021; Rosen et al., 2018). Ensuring all students have access to music education is essential for promoting equitable SEL development and addressing broader

inequalities in education. Schools must prioritize a holistic approach that integrates SEL and music to foster the well-being and success of every child.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that access to music education varies based on demographics and income. Some schools in lower-income and minority communities are more likely to lack music teachers, which (again) raises concerns about educational equity. While similar trends were observed in Alabama and Mississippi, they were not statistically significant, indicating that demographic factors alone may not fully explain disparities in access to music education in these regions.

The significant relationship between Title I status and the absence of a music teacher in Florida and Mississippi highlights the issue of resource allocation in low-income schools. While this is a relationship which cannot be linked as a cause, it does highlight that Title I schools, even though they receive additional federal funding, may still struggle to provide a well-rounded education that includes the arts.

Administrators and school boards need accurate, valid, and reliable information to understand the impact of their decisions regarding resource allocation and staffing (Burrack, et. al., 2014). These findings also highlight the need to address racial and economic inequalities in access to music education. Policymakers, educators, and advocates should focus on ways to ensure all students, no matter their race or income, have equal access to music teachers and a well-rounded education.

Recommendations for Future Study

More research is needed to understand the causes of these disparities and to find ways to close the gap in music education access. Future studies should cover more regions, review how

policies affect access, and examine school leadership's decisions on music programs. They should also track changes over time, consider how much music instruction students receive, and assess program quality. Studying student outcomes and community resources will also provide key insights for addressing these disparities.

While some states mandate access to music education in elementary schools, it is also important to focus on the actual amount of instruction students receive. The National Association for Music Education (NAfME, 2022) recommends a minimum of 90 minutes of music instruction per week to ensure students benefit from a comprehensive and effective program. A study examining whether students in states like Arkansas, Georgia, and Tennessee receive this amount of instruction could reveal significant disparities. Are some schools providing more instructional minutes than others? Additionally, it is important to assess whether students from different demographic groups are receiving equal access to both the quantity and quality of music education. This would shed light on potential inequities and help advocate for a more standardized, equitable approach to music education across these regions.

Conclusions

Music education is an important part of a well-rounded education. The purpose of this study was to describe access to elementary music education based on the demographics and median household income of each area within twelve major cities in the Southeastern United States. Research consistently demonstrates the importance of music in providing a well-rounded elementary school education. Music enhances cognitive development by improving memory, language skills, and problem-solving abilities (Hallam, 2010). It also supports students' social-emotional growth, helping them develop self-expression, emotional regulation, and empathy (Zins & Elias, 2007). Furthermore, studies have shown that music education fosters creativity

and collaboration, contributing to higher academic achievement, particularly in areas like math and reading (Schellenberg, 2004). Including music as a core subject provides students with a more holistic educational experience that nurtures both their academic and personal growth.

There may be an association between the socioeconomic status of a community and the availability of music education at a school (Elpus, 2020). Schools in higher socioeconomic areas can raise more funds than schools that are already struggling financially. Booster clubs do not help the underprivileged and only seem to work in already privileged areas (Elpus and Gris , 2019). Shaw and Auletto (2022) also found urban schools, Title I schools, poor schools, smaller schools, and students of color were less likely to have a music teacher in their school. Nichols (2020) also found that lower socioeconomic areas do not have the same access to education as wealthier school districts. Salvador and Allegood (2014) found that non-White students were less likely to have music instruction. This study demonstrated, at least in some areas of the southeastern U.S. that school systems provide music regardless of student and/or family backgrounds or location. However, some places still lack music education in their school. Thus, work is still needed so that all children are afforded music education in their elementary schools.

Music educators should aim to understand the political, social, and economic dynamics that shape policy decisions. Many policies affecting music education are often made by individuals with limited experience in the field. Teachers need to become advocates for their programs by engaging in policy discussions, building relationships with decision-makers, and working collectively to ensure music education remains a priority in schools (Shaw, 2020).

Local leadership is crucial for music education in schools. Principals and site administrators greatly influence the availability of music programs. The quality of music education can vary greatly between schools based on a principal's support (Elpus, 2017).

Ensuring every child has access to music education requires advocates to focus on educating school leaders in addition to working on state and national policy.

Anticipated Benefits

Research supports the idea that social and emotional learning is important for a child's academic success. Students who display these strategies are more likely to be successful academically and in the workplace. These strategies are often used in music classes as students are working together to create something beautiful. If students do not learn SEL skills, it is likely to interfere with academic learning (Responsive Classroom, 2016).

Could the reason some students do not receive music be aligned with class and/or race? Do state leaders and school districts realize they are keeping students in lower socioeconomic communities from specific ethnic communities from receiving a well-rounded education? Do the leaders realize they are keeping them from learning a subject that could help improve the overall livelihood of the people who live in these communities?

This study has the potential to make a contribution to the field of education by advocating for the importance of music education and addressing disparities in access. It aligns with broader efforts to promote equity and provide all students with the resources and opportunities they need to thrive academically and socially. The findings of this research could support that some cities have music education in all or most of their elementary schools, while many do not. I hope this research study helps school districts see that certain students are not receiving the same education as others and will make a change toward equal access to a whole education for everyone.

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Appendix A: IRB Determination Email

IRB Administration <irbadmin@auburn.edu>

Thu 4/25/2024 10:13 AM

To: Carrie Cruz <CSM0075@auburn.edu>

Cc: Jane Kuehne <kuehnjm@auburn.edu>; Paul Fitchett <pgf0011@auburn.edu>

Dear Ms. Cruz,

The IRB has reviewed your request for the study titled “A Descriptive Study of Elementary Student Access to School Music Education in Twelve Large Metropolitan Areas in the Southeastern United States”. The IRB has determined that your project, as described in the submission, **is not** considered human subjects research.

Further documentation for this study does not need to be submitted. If you make any changes to your study that might include human subjects research, please contact our office.

Best regards,

IRB Administration
Office of Research Compliance
540 Devall Drive Suite 200
Auburn University
Auburn, AL 36832