

POST PANDEMIC BAND PROGRAMS:  
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RETENTION AND ATTRITION

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By

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## Abstract

The present study investigated student retention and attrition in post-pandemic band programs. The global COVID-19 pandemic disrupted music education worldwide, and while many ensembles, including band programs, maintained enrolment numbers similar to pre-pandemic times, others did not. To understand why students chose to continue band following their COVID-19 pandemic-band experience, a qualitative study was conducted in which 109 band students and 35 parents/guardians of band students were surveyed, and band teachers from five high schools were interviewed. Critical to examining motivation for student retention in band programs was utilizing the psychological framework of Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, especially in relation to the construct of relatedness and community in music programs.

The findings from this study will be particularly relevant to music educators who are moving forward in a post-pandemic band program, especially given that the results from this study indicate that intrinsic factors were greater motivating forces in band retention than external factors. The study illuminated that band teachers responded to the pandemic restrictions with creativity, patience, flexibility, and adaptability while keeping their students' mental health at the forefront of their pedagogical choices and modifications. Furthermore, technology was helpful on a variety of levels and, in some cases, during the height of restrictions, was a critical component in pivoting the band program delivery model. This research study contributes to the literature in novel ways, exploring successful retention practices in relation to an unprecedented pandemic in which restrictions were imposed and extensive program delivery modifications were required. This study, therefore, is consequential in providing music educators with information about healthy post-pandemic band program outcomes in the post-pandemic climate.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, pandemic-band programs, post-pandemic band programs, intrinsic motivation, high school band retention and attrition, Self-Determination Theory

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

### **Chapter Overview**

In chapter one, I will explain the background and purpose of this study and the research statement. I will then illustrate the rationale for conducting the study, the problem statement, the motivation for my research and the central and sub-research questions.

### **Personal Context**

Music found me when I was young. I participated in every musical activity possible and adored it all. I started singing in musicals and choirs from a young age, taking piano lessons in grade five, and playing the French horn in grade six. It was grade six when I announced I would be a music teacher one day, and I did not waver from this declaration. Making music with others is my passion. I have been joyfully doing so for thirty-seven years, both in professional contexts and with my students. I have been teaching music for 27 years, and like many band programs, mine was turned upside down in the spring of 2020. Having never experienced a disruption of this magnitude, I along with many others, wondered if band could survive such a calamity. I am ecstatic that not only has band survived, but in some cases, it has come back more robust than before. I have witnessed firsthand the power of band in a student's life, and I am thrilled to have had the opportunity to dive into the experiences of five high school band programs to learn of their COVID-19 pandemic-band experiences for this research project.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study intends to uncover best practices that lead to continued enrollment during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 shutdown spring of 2020 disrupted all levels of education, including instrumental music (Hash, 2021a). During this time, band directors created new opportunities for their students, such as broader use of technology, compositional activities, lessons in theory and history and small ensemble performances (Hash, 2021a). Hash (2021a) asserts that more work is needed to develop materials and curricula to ensure progress during future shutdowns or when instrumental music students cannot attend the classroom in person. COVID-19 pandemic restrictions drastically altered many aspects of music education that factor into retention, which will be discussed throughout this study. Uncovering the factors that encourage students to continue to enroll in post-pandemic music programs will be essential to build on the existing research recommendations. This research could illuminate the predominant

resources, materials, curricula, and teaching practices that lead to noteworthy student retention in post-pandemic-band programs.

### **Research Statement**

High school music programs are designed to appeal to a wide variety of student interests and often consist of various music ensembles, including choirs and instrumental groups. Most often, the instrumental ensembles offered at this level can include concert bands, jazz bands and occasionally a marching band (Elpus & Abril, 2019; Kelly & Demorest, 2016; Kelly & Heath, 2015; Pendergast & Robinson, 2020). There are many band-related activities in addition to rehearsals that are incorporated into these ensembles, including concerts, festival performances, tours, and various community performances. These elements were significantly affected in the Spring of 2020 as the world faced the first global pandemic in decades (2020a, CBC.ca). The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, an infectious disease spread through close contact and affecting the respiratory system, prompted governments worldwide to restructure daily life which consequently disrupted many aspects of society (Nickel, 2021).

The severity of how music programs were affected by this virus was connected to the breathing activity specifically required by singers and instrumentalists. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was feared that playing brass and woodwind instruments emitted aerosols (the tiny droplets of liquid that can carry the novel coronavirus) which could lead to musicians contracting the infection and spreading it to others. The quantity of aerosols transmitted and the volume that could cause transmission still needed to be discovered, which led to the restructuring of band programs. Musicians worldwide awaited the research data to discover where the aerosols came from a given instrument and what could be done to make practice and performance spaces safer, particularly amid this COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the government and school administration restructuring of band programs impacted many elements of band programs due to the difficulties involved in what was deemed safe for an in-person instrument-playing environment. ([www.publications.saskatchewan.ca](http://www.publications.saskatchewan.ca)).

Musicians worldwide were unsure how to proceed through this unique time until research regarding the health and safety of music performance began emerging in July 2020 (Nickel, 2021). Researchers from The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), The College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA), The University of Colorado Boulder and The University of Maryland conducted a large-scale study focusing on coronavirus-

containing aerosols and the potential dangers of playing wind instruments during the outbreak (Nickel, 2021). A subsequent study, published in December 2020 (NFHS, 2020c), measured aerosol spread as participants sang, performed a monologue, and played flute, oboe, clarinet, saxophone, bassoon, trumpet, French horn, trombone, euphonium, and tuba. The findings of these studies influenced the Center for Disease Control to formulate their recommendations, and music program administrators around the globe began constructing their guidelines which significantly affected band programs. Saskatchewan Government regulations included maintaining two-meter distancing, having instrument bells covered, using puppy pads for brass condensation, thirty-minute playing intervals followed by short breaks, restrictions preventing indoor performances, and restrictions preventing touring ([www.publications.saskatchewan.ca](http://www.publications.saskatchewan.ca)). Those band teachers who were permitted to have in-person playing throughout Saskatchewan implemented these restrictions to continue to keep students engaged in music-making in a challenging environment.

### **Rationale for Study**

Band programs consist of elective classes, and because of this, student retention is often a concerning topic amongst band directors. The massive changes to band programs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions created fear that long-term student retention may be negatively affected. Music educators have a unique opportunity and responsibility to explore various aspects of post-pandemic band programs, such as best practices that assisted retention through the COVID-19 pandemic and now in the post-pandemic climate. Hash (2021a) asserts that more work is needed to develop materials and curricula to ensure progress during future shutdowns or when instrumental music students cannot attend the classroom in person. Thus, this qualitative multiple case study aims to understand vital pedagogical components that encourage students to continue to choose registration in band despite the experienced limitations. Further, this study aims to inform future pedagogical practices within secondary band programs by exploring student, teacher, and parent experiences resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on band programs still need to be assessed and may not be evident for years. My urgency to delve into the experiences of band programs and program stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic was motivated by the notion that the COVID-19 pandemic created a brand-new band experience for everyone involved, having not experienced a disruption of this magnitude. It is the hope that music

educators can learn and benefit from band programs that are flourishing with healthy enrolment in the post-pandemic climate. This study is a significant opportunity for band teachers to discover student connections to band and their motivation for continuing to choose band when programs drastically changed.

### **Statement of Problem**

Band program retention is a lingering issue in the post-pandemic climate (Weller, 2021). Many programs experienced significant attrition; some programs maintained reasonable enrolment despite the restrictions implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the height of its restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic challenged band teachers to find creative ways to engage musically and socially with remote and hybrid classes. For many band students, “finding ways to negotiate musical learning, feel ownership, and navigate social activities during COVID-19 proved difficult” (Nickel, 2021, p.10). Because of the limited band retention research in the post-pandemic context, it will be essential to delve into student and teacher experiences to determine possible reasons for the current band enrolment discrepancies. Gaining a greater understanding of the key elements and practices that influence students' continued enrolment in band programs will be vital moving forward.

### **Motivation for Research**

This case study aims to explore and understand the experiences and motivation of high school students to continue pursuing band in a post-pandemic climate. More research is needed in this area as music programs are only recently emerging from COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and the subsequent effects on programs. This qualitative multiple case study is necessary for several reasons, as a gap now exists between pre-pandemic and post-pandemic research regarding retention and attrition in band programs. This research will be valuable to band teachers and those who make administrative decisions about band programs as it could offer significant insight into necessary elements in music programs that may affect enrolment. Furthermore, it will be critical to those invested in band program success for this work to illuminate pre-pandemic, pandemic and post-pandemic best practices to inform future band program directions, as well as those elements that proved necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic but are no longer required.

## **Research Questions**

This study was motivated by the intent to learn about the following central research questions:

- Did the COVID-19 pandemic have an impact on band programs?
- What was the response of the teachers and students to the alterations of the band program as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What was the outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic for band students and band programs with respect to retention and attrition?

In order to collect information to answer the aforementioned questions, I asked the following sub-questions:

- What were some of the government-enforced restrictions on band programs?
- How were band programs affected by the changes?
- What pedagogical changes were implemented by band directors to continue program delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Did band student, band teacher and band parent/guardian perspectives on band participation change because of the COVID-19 pandemic? In what ways?
- What influences band students to continue pursuing band in post-pandemic programs?
- What can music educators learn from this experience?

## **Assumptions**

I recognize that as a music teacher with 27 years of experience, I come from a position of familiarity and knowledge about music teaching and have a vast understanding of the processes and procedures associated with running band programs. I have worked alongside many music teacher colleagues, students, and their parents, and therefore have many ideas regarding successful practices and strategies resulting in attrition and retention. As such, it is common for researchers with lived experience to seek out the answers and results that align with their own experiences and desired interpretation. It is possible that I could be biased in interpreting my results. As an experienced music educator before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, I needed to approach this study from a non-presumptuous perspective. My pandemic-band experiences would not necessarily be similar to any of the studied high school pandemic-band programs, and I wanted my experiences to be independent of the study results; therefore, I made sure not to include any aspects of my band program, such as scheduling, alternate programming or retention information when seeking and discovering common themes. Furthermore, I set aside

my personal biases when deciding which questions to ask. I did not look for themes that only resonated with my pandemic-band teaching experiences and did not ask leading questions. Lastly, I sought unfamiliar contexts with varying demographics when choosing high schools.

### **Operational Terms**

Throughout this thesis, several terms are used that require background information and explanation for the reader to have clarification and context of these broad constructs.

***COVID-19 Pandemic*** The novel coronavirus COVID-19, an infectious disease spread through close contact and affecting the respiratory system, prompted governments worldwide to restructure daily life, disrupting many aspects of society (Nickel, 2021). The most significant period of band alterations during the COVID-19 pandemic occurred between March 2020 and September 2022. During this time, the most significant alterations existed within the band program. Post-pandemic band programs exist as of September 2022 following the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, which consisted of the previously mentioned Saskatchewan government protocols.

***Pre-Pandemic:*** refers to the time before March 2020 when band programs were operating without COVID-19 restrictions. As mentioned previously, these restrictions included, but were not limited to, distancing between musicians, bell masks, and abbreviated semesters.

***Pandemic-Band:*** refers to the time between March 2020 and September 2022 when band programs' most significant protocols and alterations existed.

***Post-Pandemic Band:*** refers to September 2022, when the high school band programs in this study returned to their pre-pandemic schedules, and all government protocols were lifted.

***Retention and Attrition:*** refers to the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage (“Retention,” n. d.). In the context of this thesis, the term retention refers to band students who continue choosing to participate in band year to year. Attrition indicates the departure rate from or delays in successfully completing program requirements (Ascend Learning LLC, 2012). In the context of this research, the term attrition refers to band students who discontinue band from year to year.

***Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation*** When investigating motivation for students to continue or discontinue band, it is necessary to understand intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. As defined by Ryan and Deci (2000), intrinsic motivation is



the “doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence” (p. 56), and extrinsic motivation occurs when “an activity is done to attain some separable outcome” (p. 60).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in a theoretical framework that seeks to understand student motivation to remain in music programs despite adverse and significant impacts on their experience due to the pandemic. Evans (2015) argues that Self-determination Theory is a “unifying theoretical framework from which to pursue studies of music motivation” (MacIntyre, Schnare & Ross, 2017, p.700). The challenge can be that as a psychological construct, motivation is challenging to measure as people possess different types and amounts of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The *orientation* of motivation refers to the quantity and kind of motivation and concerns the underlying attitudes and goals that inspire action (Ryan & Deci, 2000); however, it is a critical construct to examine in relation to this study. Ryan and Deci’s Self-Determination Theory distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

As defined by Ryan and Deci (2000), intrinsic motivation is the “doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence” (p. 56), and extrinsic motivation occurs when “an activity is done to attain some separable outcome” (p. 60). SDT posits that people have a small number of core psychological needs: autonomy, competency, and relatedness (MacIntyre, Schnare & Ross, 2017, p.700). Researchers propose that it is essential for music educators to understand the varying degrees of extrinsic motivation because intrinsic motivation cannot always be relied on to foster learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). More active and volitional versus passive and controlling forms of extrinsic motivation can be “an essential strategy for successful teaching” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.55). MacIntyre, Schnare and Ross (2017) contend that a musician's motivation is a “complex, multifaceted, integrated system of internal and external processes that gives behaviour its underlying energy and direction” (p. 699). This notion creates a compelling argument for music educators to learn the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation with respect to student retention.

### **Thesis Overview**

The introductory chapter has provided information regarding the background and purpose of the study, the research statement, the problem statement, and the motivation for the research. Chapter Two highlights relevant literature in order to situate the forthcoming research. Chapter

Three provides an explanation and justification for the qualitative research methodology and the data collection methods. Chapters Four, Five and Six present the data and perspectives of five band teachers, 109 surveyed band students, and 35 band parents/guardians respectively and include rich quotes and analysis of common themes. In Chapter Seven, I review the main and sub-research questions and discuss common themes experienced by all three cohorts. Additionally, Chapter 7 includes the limitations of this research, the impact of this research, and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

There has been extensive research revealing the myriad of ways in which music education benefits students (Fredrickson, 1997; Kennedy, 2002; Campbell, 2007; Kuntz, 2011; Dagaz, 2012; Oehlerking, 2015; Koops, 2018; Barden, 2019; Hash, 2021, Lautenheizer, 2021; Baker, Forbes & McLeod, 2022). This research extols the benefits of music education as it relates to students' mental, physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. And yet (Iuşca, 2022; Lautzenheizer, 2021; Oehlerking, 2015; Morrison, 2001; Adderly, Kennedy and Berz, 2003) are a sample of researchers who assert that music is not only a powerful and important factor in the educational system, but that it extends beyond to also benefit society. Students who study music gain powerful tools for understanding human experiences, adapting to and respecting others' way of thinking, expressing themselves, studying nonverbal communication, making informed judgements about cultural issues and learning artistic approaches to problem-solving (Iuşcă, 2022). Therefore, all students deserve music education to benefit individual self-esteem, memory, self-expression, socialization, academic success, teamwork, structure, discipline, and enjoyment (Iuşcă, 2022).

#### COVID-19 Pandemic Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted music programs and added a new layer of factors that affect retention (Linaberry, 2022). Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, The American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) early COVID-19 pandemic safety recommendations turned music programs upside down by making the following recommendations: Students must stay six feet apart (nine feet for trombonists); instruments should have bell masks<sup>1</sup> with a minimum efficiency reporting value (MERV) of 13 bracket<sup>2</sup> (although any covering is better than none); spit valves should empty into absorbent sheets like puppy pads<sup>3</sup>; instructors should limit rehearsal time to 30 minutes; instructors should wait for

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<sup>1</sup> Bell masks were designed to fit over the instrument's bell to block aerosol droplets from escaping the instrument.

<sup>2</sup> Filters with a bracket contain a specially treated polyurethane element which assures near total protection from foreign material entering the system.

<sup>3</sup> Puppy training pee pads were placed beside brass players so they could empty their water keys on them and dispose of them at the end of each rehearsal.

one HVAC air exchange<sup>4</sup> between classes; and HEPA filters<sup>5</sup> should be in rehearsal spaces with a preference for outdoor rehearsals over indoor (Lindner, 2020). The CDC's guidelines set the foundation as school administrators decided how to deliver music programming and what to allow in terms of instruments and scheduling in high school music programs.

Of particular relevance to Saskatchewan music programs, the Saskatchewan Government guidelines directed band programs to observe the following restrictions: maintain a two-meter distance, with more distance for trombone players; limit rehearsal to 30 minutes and then clear the room for a minimum of one air exchange (three air exchanges being the ideal); use HEPA filters depending on the size of the room; use a shield<sup>6</sup> on flutes; and use a disposable absorbent material to catch spit condensation, such as a puppy pad for brass players ([www.publicationsaskatchewan.ca](http://www.publicationsaskatchewan.ca)). They were additionally encouraged to follow other CDC recommendations on hygiene and gathering sizes ([www.cdc.ca](http://www.cdc.ca)). As a result of these restrictions and their inherent challenges in following them successfully due to a lack of resources, several Canadian Provinces canceled band programs altogether, including Saskatoon and Regina Elementary Schools (Quenneville, 2020). The current post-pandemic climate involves no further restrictions, but the effects of the previous years linger.

The unmistakable lingering effects of the elementary school band program restrictions are crucial when looking at high school attrition, as the success of high school bands often depends on their elementary school counterparts (Weller, 2021). An in-depth look at sixty band directors and their students from several schools in the United States revealed that junior high and middle school average retention declined by five percent post-pandemic (Weller, 2021). Attrition levels varied depending on internal and external factors. Those who offered more enrolment opportunities, such as allowing students to enter late or as beginners, experienced less attrition (Weller, 2021). Some high school band programs maintained healthy enrolment in the current post-pandemic climate despite the difficulty of delivering band traditionally, yet many have suffered significantly (Burke, 2020). Despite the COVID-19 pandemic's adverse influence

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<sup>4</sup> An HVAC air exchanger is an air-to-air heat exchange which brings two air streams of different temperatures into thermal contact, transferring heat from the exhausting inside air to incoming outside air during the heating season.

<sup>5</sup> A HEPA filter is a high-efficiency particulate absorbing air filter.

<sup>6</sup> Flute shields were made of plastic and attached to the flute head joint in order to redirect a flutist's air away from others and toward themselves without changing the quality of sound or tone.

on band retention rates, a small body of research shows that the COVID-19 pandemic's influence varies from school to school (Burke, 2020). Thus, it is crucial to understand other factors that might influence these retention rates.

### **Factors Affecting Retention and Attrition**

The status of music programs as elective or compulsory courses varies within Canada, and around the world. Retaining band students is a crucial element in the growth and continuation of band programs and an ongoing discussion topic amongst music educators, advocates, and enthusiasts. As high school programming continues to expand its breadth of course offerings, more options are provided under the constraints of the school day and timetable. Further, as students possess more autonomy in course selection, they face several elective decisions each year. Over the past few decades, researchers have revealed multiple theories for why students continue or discontinue their instrumental music journey. Previous positive musical experiences often play a role for students in continuing their musical journey (Evans & Liu, 2019; E. Freer & Evans, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic-band experience was unlike anything students of this generation had experienced. As such, learning why students continued in band post-pandemic will offer valuable insight to music educators.

Examining pre-pandemic high school band retention research is critical to understanding the impact of the global pandemic on current retention. When studying the literature surrounding retention and attrition in high school band programs, themes such as personal enjoyment, meaning/value, social climate, self-efficacy, parent influence, teacher influence and psychological needs emerged as significant factors.

#### ***Social Climate and Peer Influence***

Bandura (1977) suggested that people learn best by observing the behaviours and attitudes of others. One can deduce that this can best be achieved by being a part of a community which presents the opportunity for one to observe the behaviours and attitudes of others. Thus, students who are part of a music community can feel connected to members within the community and can ultimately influence others to join the community. Therefore, friendship and social interaction in music communities often affect retention (Campbell et al., 2007; Dagaz, 2012; Fredrickson, 1997; Kennedy, 2002; Kuntz, 2011; Warnock, 2005). Specifically, Kuntz (2011) and Kennedy (2002) found similar results when focusing on extra-curricular instrumental ensembles. Neill's (1998) study suggests that the ensemble community aspect also impacts high

school choral students' decisions. Furthermore, students are more likely to discontinue if they feel disconnected from other ensemble members (Adderly et al., 2003; Morrison, 2001). Additional research by Barden (2019) and Hash (2021b) indicates that students are more likely to quit if they do not have any friends in the band. The benefits of the social experience students receive while participating in school music ensembles are a valuable contribution to retaining their commitment and continued participation (Allsup, 2012).

Students can form strong interpersonal and group relationships in a band (Adderly, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003). Additionally, Oehlerking (2015) posits that band is one of society's most inclusive social networks. Since schools are seeing greater student population diversity, being a band member can assist a student's global understanding. For example, band students for whom English is not their first language can communicate through music-making with other students. Band repertoire can include music with various cultural origins and connections and provide opportunities for students to share music they enjoy listening to. Furthermore, students who play in band enter into a personal relationship with others each time they make music together (Fielding, 2000). Because band students often have opportunities to interact for longer than one semester, developing student relationships can be informative in understanding one another's cultural backgrounds. Comparable to Bandura (1977), who suggested people learn best by observing behaviour, Lautzenheiser (2021) asserts that the best recruiters for band programs are the performing students. When band students enjoy their activity, they present to others a desirable group to join.

The social aspect of the band experience extends into the cognitive domain as well. Making music with others allows students to develop a growth mindset, learn empathy and experience teamwork at the highest cognitive level (Baker, Forbes & McLeod, 2022). An example of this in action is evidenced in the following study, where authors surveyed members of the Tasmanian Youth Orchestra and posit that pursuing musical performance goals enables students to learn the value of commitment and grit, which assist in developing a growth mindset (Baker, Forbes & McLeod, 2022). Music-making is a shared creative experience in a musical ensemble, and empathy develops when students recognize they are sharing in their musical learning and development. Further, musicians must listen to each other to understand what is happening around them and adjust their playing during ensemble music-making (Baker, Forbes & McLeod, 2022). The bonding hormone oxytocin is released during music making, which

supports a sense of togetherness, and reduces “levels of the stress hormone cortisol and boosts immune function” (Baker, Forbes & McLeod, 2022, p.4). The pleasure associated with being together and making music may strongly influence student choice to continue with music.

Personal enjoyment, meaningfulness, and value in students’ playing are prominent factors affecting band students' retention rates. Adderly, Kennedy and Berz (2003) interviewed 60 band, choir and orchestra students and found that a positive social climate significantly affects student retention. In particular, students stressed the importance of meaningful relationships within the band, benefiting their well-being, personal growth, and enjoyment. In addition to simply “liking music,” participants felt they were “well-rounded people” for participating in a music group (p.195). Furthermore, students assert that in addition to making music, performing together added to the meaningfulness of their experience (Adderly, Kennedy & Berz, 2003). According to Morrison (2001), being a member of an ensemble creates community, and participation becomes an “aspect of students’ self-identity” (p. 25). Moreover, membership in one or more musical ensembles creates a social unit for students extending far beyond the music room (Morrison, 2001). Thus, one can conclude that when students find value and meaning in musical activities, these are strong motivating factors for adolescents to continue.

### ***Meaningful Music-Making***

Value and meaning in music-making may also be connected to motivating factors for student retention in band, as they contribute to heightening students’ emotional awareness. One might argue that students who understand the value and meaning of playing in an ensemble possess emotional awareness, as St. George, Holbrook, and Cantwell (2014) suggest that “the appeal of music lies in its connections to emotions” (p.1), and strong positive feelings and affinity for music emerged from their research on reasons to continue playing an instrument. When discussing their child’s musical opportunities and motivation, parents listed motivational factors such as agency, pride, self-actualization, and self-growth as beneficial emotional growth factors garnered from playing in an ensemble (Koops, 2018). Parents in Koops’ (2018) study further listed musical, cognitive, social, kinesthetic, and enjoyment factors as beneficial; however, the social and emotional factors held the most weight. Parents also cited the importance of the emotional release experienced by young musicians through playing music (Koops, 2018). Multiple researchers believe emotional awareness “influences students’ motivation, engagement, self-regulation and learning outcomes” (Arguedas, Daradoumis, T., & Xhafa, F., 2016, p.101).

Furthermore, St. George, Holbrook & Cantwell (2014) state that “the appeal of music lies in its connections to emotions” (p.1). When students are aware of their emotions, they become more conscious of their situation, allowing them to adapt their behaviour to benefit their group (Arguedas, Daradoumis, T., & Xhafa, F., 2016).

The student pleasure associated with participating in high school music ensembles is a primary motivational predictor for retention (Baker, 2009; Neill, 1998). Relatedly, Stewart (2005) and Baker (2008) found themes of personal enjoyment and love of music among students' reasons for playing in band. Moreover, researchers discovered that the same reward system that food and addictive drugs stimulate could be stimulated when musicians listen to music they enjoy (Iuşcă, 2022). As such, dopamine and serotonin are released, triggering the pleasure and reward centers of the brain. That “feel good” sensation can incentivize students to keep engaging with music (Baker, Forbes & McLeod, 2022). Stewart’s (2005) study found that many students who enjoy playing at school and school-related band functions also enjoy playing their instruments outside of class time. Many facets of enjoyment for music-making continually emerge as motivators to play in a band.

### ***Self-Efficacy and Psychological Needs***

A student’s musical self-efficacy can contribute to their perception of purpose and meaning in their music-making ability. Bandura (1977) defines self-efficacy as a particular set of personal beliefs determining how well one can execute a plan of action in prospective situations. In simpler terms, self-efficacy is a person’s confidence in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. According to McPherson and McCormick (2006) and Stewart (2005), self-efficacy is a significant predictor of achievement in music. When considering retention, this theory “deserves more focused attention by music researchers” (McPherson & McCormick, 2006, p.334). This study deals with retention and attrition; therefore, it is essential to understand these psychological factors. Conversely, Bandura (1997) asserts that “insidious self-doubts can easily overrule the best of skills” (p.35), reinforcing the importance of developing positive self-efficacy early in the musical journey. Ames and Archer (1998) discovered when studying the motivation of 176 junior high/high school students that when students get a chance to correct mistakes, they have a positive attitude toward the class and believe success will follow their efforts. Relatedly, Krause and Kirby (2020) asked 190 adults their reasons for ceasing participation in a previous musical activity and learned that the participants quit “due to their lack of musical ability” (p. 405).



Clements (2002) revealed that choral students exhibit similar characteristics. Like instrumental musicians, students who chose to remain in choir had a higher self-efficacy score than those who did not. Self-efficacy continues to emerge as an integral factor influencing retention in multiple strands of music education.

### ***Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivators***

Students are extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to participate and play in music programs (MacIntyre, Schnare & Ross, 2017), and a music program can meet the psychological needs of students (Evans & Freer, 2018). Comparable to Ryan and Deci's (2000) definition of intrinsic motivation as the "doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction" (p.56), Dev (1997) first described intrinsic motivation as an internal curiosity and desire to engage. An example of intrinsic motivation applicable to band students includes statements such as "I practice my instrument because I enjoy getting better" or "I perform music to escape reality." Extrinsic motivation statements might include "I practice so I can win trophies or scholarships". Literature suggests that each method has advantages and disadvantages (Davis, 2018, p.2), but Shia (1998) believes extrinsic motivation, separate from the behaviours they cause, should not be used. Yoo (2021) and Davis (2018) discovered that teachers who attend to students' psychological needs while providing high levels of structure could significantly impact students' intrinsic motivation. However, Davis (2018) asked students to describe how and why they joined the band and noted that extrinsic factors such as peers and social influences are prevalent and should not be overlooked. Peers are often the most significant influence on retention or attrition (Davis, 2018). A high level of trust, acceptance, and self-confidence contributes positively to retention and can develop when students experience an interactive and affective commitment to a group (Dagaz, 2012).

Music learning or performance may help satisfy any or all the psychological needs described in Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (MacIntyre & Potter, 2013). The need for competence includes using one's skills, interactions, or capabilities to help control situations and outcomes. Further, the need for relatedness concerns the desire for interaction and connection with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The need for autonomy reflects a "sense of free will and choice when it comes to one's behaviour" (MacIntyre, Schnare & Ross, 2017, p.701). Klinedinst's (1991) research identified a relationship between self-concept and musical participation. Additionally, Lang (2015) discovered that "when the conditions of optimal

engagement were analyzed according to the definitions of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, they could be reduced and contained within the psychological factors of Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT" (p.330). Self-Determination Findings from MacIntyre, Schnare & Ross (2017) reinforce the motivational benefits music teachers would gain when finding ways to influence and work towards satisfying the three basic needs of the SDT: relatedness, competency, and autonomy. One example is allowing students meaningful input into the musical repertoire, performances, and lessons (MacIntyre, Schnare & Ross, 2017, p. 711).

**Intrinsic Motivation.** Rodes (2022) posits that the three most prevalent pillars of intrinsic motivation among students are achievement, autonomy, and community. Furthermore, MacIntyre, Schnare and Ross (2017) maintain that a musician's motivation is complex, multifaceted, and both internal and external. Using Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory (Vallerand, 2000) to consider musicians' motivation, MacIntyre, Schnare, and Ross (2017) conclude that internal rather than external regulation correlates more strongly with music-related variables. Related research asserts that intrinsic motivation can exist within individuals, and contrarily, it can also exist in the relationship between individuals and activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), considered a sub-theory of SDT, argues that events during an action encouraging feelings of competence can enhance intrinsic motivation. CET further specifies that feelings of competence must accompany a sense of autonomy to improve intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Positive performance feedback is linked to enhanced intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1971; Harackiewicz, 1979); conversely, negative performance feedback diminishes it.

Most of the research on the effects of environmental events on intrinsic motivation has "focused on autonomy versus control rather than that of competence" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 59). Several studies observing classrooms reveal that autonomy-supportive teachers inspire greater intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and the desire for a challenge (Deci, E. L., Schwartz, A. J., Sheinman, L., & Ryan, R. M., 1981; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). In similar research, overly controlled students lose interest and cannot learn as well (Benware & Deci, 1984; Grolnick & Ryan, 1987). SDT and CET assert that intrinsic motivation can be encouraged by teachers who support autonomy and competence; however, Ryan and Deci (2000) believe intrinsic motivation will occur if the individual holds an intrinsic interest in the activity or deem the activity challenging and aesthetically valuable.

**Extrinsic Motivation.** As defined by Ryan and Deci (2000), extrinsic motivation occurs when “an activity is done to attain some separable outcome” (p. 60). Two examples of extrinsic motivation which contain different degrees of autonomy are one student who does their homework for fear of parental repercussions and another who does their homework to the best of their ability because they believe it will be valuable to their chosen career. Both examples are intentional and extrinsically motivated actions that vary in relative autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to the literature, intrinsic motivation, as described above, weakens with each advancing grade, and many activities people participate in after childhood are extrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT proposes that extrinsic motivation will vary based on the degree to which it is autonomous (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Contrarily, SDT describes internalization as a continuum ranging from “unwillingness, to passive compliance, to active personal commitment” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 60). It is the ability of children to learn and absorb or internalize certain behaviours rather than being specifically told to learn the behaviour. Increased internalization leads to “greater persistence, more positive self-perceptions, and a better quality of engagement” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 61).

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) asserts that integrated motivation is the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation and can occur when “identified regulations have been fully assimilated to the self” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 62). The more one internalizes an action, and the more the activity is assimilated to the self, the more one’s extrinsically motivated actions become self-determined. This concept shares qualities with intrinsic motivation but is still extrinsic because integrated regulation derives an outcome separate from the behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Educators, specifically band teachers, can play a crucial role in facilitating internalization by facilitating a sense of belonging and connectedness within their ensemble. SDT refers to this concept of connection and belonging as relatedness, as students feel respected and cared for, resulting in a willingness to accept classroom values (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

As competence is another psychological nutriment associated with SDT and related to motivation, the concept of musical self-esteem has been linked to a student’s perception of competence and the desire to learn (MacIntyre, Schnare & Ross, 2017). They further assert that intrinsic motives play a more prominent role in the motivational system, while extrinsic ones appear less influential (MacIntyre, Schnare & Ross, 2018). The final model of their study

indicated that extrinsic motivation had a significant effect on perceived competence compared with the more internally motivated musician.

Furthermore, addressing individual differences in specific needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness could be beneficial to understanding retention. For example, learning which style of teaching students respond best to, more flexible versus more structured, may go a long way “toward creating a virtuous cycle of motivation for music learning and performance” (MacIntyre, Schnare & Ross, 2018, p. 712) Music educators could further consider investigating methods to satisfy the three basic psychological needs in the SDT, such as “tailoring their attempts to increase motivation to the specific needs of their learners” (p.711). In other words, music teachers might consider ways to increase student motivation with a strengthened understanding of their students' basic psychological and individual needs.

### ***Parental Influence***

The issue of parental involvement in education has been the subject of more than 3,000 doctoral dissertations; a significant portion of this research suggests that parental involvement is related to student success (Zdinski, 1996). The positive effects of parental encouragement for music-making begin during students' first years playing music. Brokaw's (1983) and Doan's (1973) investigations regarding parental assistance with practice revealed its positive effects on middle school band student achievement and performance. Kehrberg (1984) obtained similar findings when examining a sample of senior high band students. Contrarily, Zdiniski (1987; 1992) presented mixed findings between parental involvement and achievement in middle school band; not all parental involvement impacted achievement. Parents' expectancy and support for making music, such as taking their child to concerts over an extended time, are also factors in retention (Creech & Hallam, 2003; Dai & Schader, 2002). Thus, parents/guardians can provide positive attitudes toward learning music (Zdinski, 1996), which will encourage their young musician to continue choosing music.

The relationship between parental influence and students' decisions to pursue music is complex. Zdinski (1996) conducted an early study in this area and revealed parental involvement to be significantly related to affective, cognitive, and performance outcomes. Of particular note, the relationship between musical achievement scores and parental involvement was weaker at the secondary level (Zdinski, 1996). An essential and frequently emerging theme which influences student motivation and retention in band is the influence of parents and their general attitude

toward making music (Corenblum & Marshall, 1998; McPherson, 2009). McPherson (2009) suggested a research model highlighting that a child's desire to continue participating in music is significantly affected by parent-child interaction. Further, Warnock (2009) discovered that parental encouragement was the most substantial factor influencing sixth-grade students' continued music participation. Recognizing how influential parents can be when researching retention rates is essential.

### ***Teacher Influence and Support***

A breadth of music education research reveals the significance of the role of the teacher on band program student enjoyment and rates of retention (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2013; Dill Bruenger, 2009; Evans & Liu, 2019). Key factors such as autonomy support, motivational climate, interpersonal involvement, and musical expertise, as suggested by Yoo (2020), are how music teachers can influence retention. Students with autonomy and the freedom to express their choices, ideas, and opinions are more likely to continue engaging in music (Evans & Liu, 2019; Freer & Evans, 2018; Liu, 2016). Bruenger (2009) discovered that a motivational climate in which teachers encourage cooperative learning and value each student's role within a group encourages retention. Jagow (2007) advocates that warm and caring teachers who create supportive interpersonal involvement will influence students' desire to stay in music. Interpersonal involvement results in stronger feelings of relatedness among students and positively impacts students' intentions to persist in music (Costa-Giomi et al., 2005; Hayes, 2004; Sloboda & Howe, 1991; Stewart, 2005). Additionally, when students perceive a teacher-inspired, task-involving, motivational climate in which students are working on skill development and everyone is equally contributing, they are motivated to continue pursuing involvement in music programs (Bailey, 2006; Dill Bruenger, 2019; Freer & Evans, 2019; Schmidt, 2005).

To maintain healthy enrolment, music teachers must understand the community they serve, specifically the students they work with (Allsup, 2012; Culp & Clauhs; Varner, 2019). Teachers who possess this understanding, in addition to musical expertise, can give feedback positively and are highly influential in a student's decision to continue with music (Adderly et al., 2003; Corenblum & Marshall, 1998; Klinedinst, 1991; Siebenaler, 2006; Sloboda & Howe, 1991). Further, feedback based on students' needs highly influences student motivation (Arguedas et al., 2016). Yoo (2021) posits that music teachers can support fundamental

psychological needs in addition to providing high levels of structure, encouraging motivation, creating positive educational outcomes, and persistence in music. Further, Krause et al. (2019) discovered that the student-teacher relationship is critical for school divisions to continue participating, reinforcing the necessity for teachers to know and understand their music communities.

## **Conclusion**

The review of the literature reveals that there needs to be more research with respect to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on retention and attrition in high school band programs. As such, it was essential to uncover previously defined factors that affected band program retention and attrition in order to apply them in the current study in a different musical context and climate to see if they are applicable. The findings in this chapter outline social climate and peer influence as significant factors in band students' choices to remain in high school band. Further, students desire meaningful music-making experiences, as that influences their desire to make music and participate in elective music courses at the high school level. In addition to self-efficacy, psychological needs: relatedness, autonomy and competence are critical to a student's desire to be involved. Band teachers have an essential role in meeting those needs. Lastly, parent/guardian support can influence students' decisions to continue their musical journey.

The void in the literature now propels further study in this area as a result of new conditions that may affect student attrition and retention in ways that have not been experienced in pre-pandemic times. As such, the questions: did the COVID-19 pandemic impact band programs?; what was the response of the teachers and students to the alterations of the band program as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?; and what was the outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic for band students and band programs with respect to retention and attrition, are relevant and timely.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter includes an overview of qualitative research and the case study design which informed the present study. Additionally, a description of the research strategies utilized in the multiple-case study, including the selection of each case, participant recruitment, sources of data, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, limitations of the research, and ethical considerations, is provided.

#### **Qualitative Research**

As a researcher, I have a choice to investigate world problems with a quantitative or qualitative lens or a combination of both in mixed methods. To investigate COVID-19 pandemic-band experiences, I was interested in talking to band teachers, band students and parents/guardians of band students who participated in this type of ensemble during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, qualitative research was the ideal choice for this study as this type of research aims to understand and explain participant meaning (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Participant testimonials and comments will be vital to this study as they will inform music teachers and program administrators of critical factors affecting students' choice to continue playing in band in the post-pandemic climate as reported in their own words regarding their own experiences. Further, Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as:

An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed informants' views, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p.15).

The global pandemic was a challenge to social norms and human interaction. By analyzing the experiences of band students, band teachers, and band parents/guardians during the global COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher will discover the inspiration and common elements that encouraged band students to continue enrolling in band classes. These accounts will be significant as all prior research regarding band program retention is based on pre-pandemic programming. Post-pandemic music programs were revolutionized out of necessity, and their effects are new to our understanding. Of the many reasons Morrow, Rakhsha and Castaneda (2001) provide for the use of qualitative research, essential to this study is its ability to “uniquely

capture the meanings made by participants of their experiences” (p. 582). Since the lived experiences of teachers, students, and their parents are paramount to understanding the musical and social climate surrounding this research study, qualitative methodology captures this most appropriately and authentically.

### **Case Study**

Creswell (2018) asserts that case studies are a design of inquiry that allows the researcher to develop an in-depth analysis of how a program, event, activity, or process affects several individuals (Creswell, 2018). For this research, a case study allowed me to consider all of those variables: to study and analyze the experiences of several stakeholders in band programs who felt the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of a case study provides an in-depth investigation into a case - a unique phenomenon or experience - in its natural context (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007; Houghton et al., 2013; Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). In this example, the unique phenomenon is the situation of a global pandemic, and teachers, students, and parents/guardians were reporting on band programs as they existed in their most current and natural context. It is a unique way to explore a phenomenon for which there may exist little to no understanding, and it is the preferred research method for gaining an understanding of the how or the why of a given situation set to be studied in its real-life context (Creswell et al., 2007; Yin, 2008). As this was the first global pandemic in more than 100 years, little understanding exists of how high school band programs fared through the COVID-19 pandemic. In summary, case study research is useful for studying a phenomenon in its natural context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003), and it is an appropriate approach for examining this specific situation of study.

### **Multiple Case Study**

It has previously been explained how the case study is an ideal approach for this particular research as it is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p.13). More fittingly for this research is the need to consider a multiple case study as there are several different cohorts who are contributing to the data collection. According to Creswell (2013), a multiple-case design explores a real-life multiple-bounded system through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Brink, 2018). Three real-life multiple-bounded cases are involved in this study: five



high school band programs; their band students; and the student's parents/guardians in diverse schools from varying parts of the province who all experienced pandemic-band. The interviews were bound by a time frame of one month, and they were all completed between October and November 2022. The surveys were to be completed by band students and band parents/guardians within two weeks of the teachers' interviews.

A multiple case study design allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the research questions. It enables the researcher to understand the differences and similarities that could possibly result from the data between the multiple cases studied (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). This multiple case study approach was appropriate as the rationale for purposive sampling intentionally sought cases that expressed both similarities and differences. For example, each high school had different logistics and protocols regarding in-person playing, but their similarities resided in their facilities. Additionally, some band classes were strategically distanced around the music area, while another group went outside to play under a circus tent. Some schools were in an abbreviated semester system, and others were not. The multiple case study allowed for the discovery of authentic COVID-19 pandemic band experiences from multiple band teachers, band students, and band parents/guardians in five high schools, which contributed to rich data collection.

***Case selection.*** A vital component of this study was selecting the first case: five high school band directors. Since most high school band programs were not completely shut down like some elementary schools, I believed high schools would be most appropriate for this study. Purposive sampling allowed me to target different levels of teaching experience and demographics. As such, I chose for the cases to be bound by role – band teacher, band student, band parent/guardian – rather than by demographic, setting, or school. This type of case selection reduced variables of school division wealth and resources that could lead to comparisons of privilege in addition to protecting band students and band parents/guardians' freedom of expression since their responses would not be linked to their band teacher or school. Creswell (2018) asserts that qualitative research aims to purposefully select participants that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question. For each case study, I used purposive sampling and sought band directors who had taught during the pre-pandemic years, through the COVID-19 pandemic and were currently teaching in the post-pandemic band program to fit this important consideration. With the understanding that there are more than five

high schools in Saskatchewan, I chose the specific schools for this study based on the experiences and offerings of the band teachers. Each teacher maintained healthy enrolment in the post-pandemic climate, bringing wide-ranging COVID-19 pandemic experiences to this study.

Furthermore, the band teachers in this study were from different geographical areas of Saskatchewan. South, Central and West Saskatchewan Regions and Public and Catholic School Divisions were represented. Each band teacher provided a different array of extra-curricular opportunities in their schools. Teachers with varying levels of experience were chosen for this study: a newer educator within their first five years of teaching, three educators with approximately 25 years of experience, and one teacher with 35 years of experience. Band students and band parents/guardians then formed the second and third cases with their anonymous participation in the survey. I chose to structure these latter two cases this way so that participants felt they could participate in the survey without academic penalty or advantage and so that their answers would be honest and without worry of any connection to their school or band teacher. Although I chose the band teachers for this study for the reasons mentioned above, I had no control over which students or parents/guardians would choose to complete the surveys as I did not have direct contact with them or have any background or contact information regarding the students in the classes or their parents/guardians.

## **Sources of data**

### ***Interviews***

Researchers collect data on an instrument or test (Creswell, 2018). Instruments for this study included Zoom interviews and online surveys. According to Yin (2003), the interview is one of the most crucial case study sources. More specifically, interviews with open-ended semi-structured questions allow respondents to explain their authentic experiences in their own words and allow for clarification and further prompting questions from the interviewer. Five band teachers participated in semi-structured interviews over Zoom. The shortest interview was 35 minutes, and the longest was 42 minutes. Cohen and Manion (1994) posit three purposes for using interviews as a distinctive research technique: to serve as a principal means of gathering information that can relate directly to the research questions, to test or suggest new hypotheses, and to confirm findings whilst using other methods (Lang, 2015). Therefore, I chose the interview as a principal data collection instrument for the teachers in this study because I could gather information from them that related directly to the central research and sub-research

questions. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to be asked the same questions, however, within a flexible framework. I used open-ended semi-structured questions to encourage band teachers to talk openly about their experiences. That is to say, they were free to share their views, opinions, and authentic details of what it was like to teach band during the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant advantage of the interview process for this study was that it allowed those being interviewed to give personal responses, and it allowed the interviewer the opportunity to ask and probe for more information (Cohen & Manion, 1994). My goal for each of the five high school case studies was to research and examine their authentic pandemic experiences. Essentially, I wanted to uncover the nature and presence of issues within situated contexts, thereby making visible that which might be invisible (Lang, 2015). For these reasons, interviews were arranged, and questions were designed to have participants reflect on their pre-pandemic band, pandemic-band, and post-pandemic band experiences.

### *Surveys*

Survey research methodology can collect data to answer qualitative and quantitative research questions (Creswell, 2018). In relation to this study, it is important to collect data that specifically addresses qualitative research questions as it allows responders to share their experiences in their own words. Another advantage to utilizing surveys is that they can be administered in a variety of contexts. For example, surveys can be administered one-on-one, in a group setting, over the phone, via mail, or electronically (Bowling, 2005). For this research study, I chose to administer surveys electronically through the university-approved Survey Monkey platform and to be completed individually rather than in a group setting to reach a broad range of band students. This research benefited from the use of anonymous surveys in a variety of ways. Surveyed band students and band parents/guardians could respond openly and honestly; responders were not subjected to influence or pressure from the teacher or interviewer; the electronic option allowed responders to complete the survey at their convenience; and it allowed me to potentially capture more data since the time to arrange individual interviews with each responder would have been prohibitive. When survey responders can access the survey anytime, it can potentially optimize participant engagement.

Finally, the survey data instrument allows for gathering information that can describe trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population or measures the associations among variables of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2018). The survey design for this

research targets the trends, attitudes, and opinions of a sample of a population of band students and band parents/guardians who experienced pandemic-band. Following each interview with band teachers, I sent a poster with a Quick Response (QR) code linked to the university approved SurveyMonkey site to each band teacher to share with students. Recognizing that with each mode of administration (Bowling, 2005) or additional potential for personnel to interfere with influencing the results, these surveys intentionally were anonymous, conducted independently, and each participant provided a pseudonym at the beginning of their survey. Unfortunately, the students often chose inappropriate pseudonyms, for which I did not feel I should use in this thesis. Therefore, all survey respondents are referred to with initials. This decision to use initials further anonymizes the participants. This study's short answer survey research questions were designed to have participants reflect on their pre-pandemic band, pandemic band, and post-pandemic band experiences.

### **Participant Recruitment**

Band teachers in the current study were purposely recruited. Purposive sampling is participant selection determined by the amount of detail individuals can provide regarding a phenomenon (Havercamp & Young, 2007; Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005) and, thus, not a random selection of participants. Participants in this study needed to be band teachers, band students, or band parents having experienced a high school band experience before, during, and after COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. I began by seeking ethics permission from three school divisions. Once approval was granted, I emailed selected band teachers to schedule interviews (see Appendix A). After consent was obtained from each participant teacher, each interview was conducted separately over two weeks, and the interviews ranged from 35 to 42 minutes (see Appendix B). Each interview was recorded and saved in secure password-protected files on the personal computers of myself and my supervisor. Once each interview transcription was complete, I sent it to each band teacher and invited them to clarify or alter anything that they felt needed to be corrected. All participants were satisfied with their transcripts. Following the interviews, each band teacher provided a poster to their band students and band parents/guardians containing a QR code linking them to an anonymous survey (see Appendix C).

### **Data Collection**

I used multiple data collection sources, including interviews and surveys, in this research to provide a more convincing and accurate case study (Casey & Houghton, 2010; Yin, 1994) of

each cohort involved. Once participants provided consent, the next step in the research process was to arrange a time for the individual interviews with band teachers to be followed by anonymous band student and band parent/guardian surveys. Each interview was completed separately and ranged from 30-42 minutes. These interviews were recorded and saved in secure files on my and my advisor's computers. Once I had transcribed all of the interviews, I provided each participant with a transcription interview and asked for an email confirmation to verify their receipt and approval of the documentation. Additionally, participants were invited to discuss any transcript clarifications or alterations they desired before I proceeded, and all were satisfied. Each band teacher then shared a poster containing a QR code linked to an anonymous Survey Monkey survey for band students and band parents/guardians (see Appendix D). The student survey consisted of 24 short answer questions (see Appendix G) which, on average, took 12 minutes for the band students to complete. The parent/guardian survey consisted of 11 short answer questions (see Appendix I) and, on average, took 7 minutes for parents/guardians to complete. Both surveys were designed to learn about experiences in band before the pandemic, during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic climate.

### **Data Analysis**

At the conclusion of the data collection, it was important to consider how the abundance of comments collected from three cohorts of participants would then be analyzed. Qualitative data often employs an inductive process to allow themes and patterns to emerge throughout the research process rather than aiming to fit the data into pre-existing categories formulated by the researcher (Percy et al., 2015). I recognize the importance of this process as it would be very conceivable with my teaching experience to have formulated categories and anticipated results in my mind when approaching data analysis. Therefore, an inductive process allows the themes to be generated from the ground up and in this case, that allows the themes to emerge from the data sources themselves rather than my own preconceived ideas. The inductive process allows for concurrent reflexive revision of themes, thereby providing an authentic account of the studied phenomenon (Ahern, 1999; Hays & Singh, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013). In this way, I could compare the emerging themes from each participant with other participants in the same cohort and across cohorts rather than comparing them to my own beliefs and understanding.

Yin (2008) suggests that the most meaningful findings can be highlighted throughout the analysis process so that the analysis truly reflects the significant findings identified. Data for this

study was analyzed case by case through thematic analysis and later by cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006). Anderson (2010) posits that the volume of data can make data analysis and interpretation time-consuming and that findings can be more difficult and time-consuming to characterize. This process was indeed time consuming as I received a lot of data from the interviews and surveys; however, I took pride in the process of comparing responses and seeing the emerging trends and themes surface from the information. Themes emerged from the interviews and survey data which then allowed for the formulation of themes based on the shared experiences of the band teachers, band students and band parents. By analyzing the experiences of these three cohorts during the COVID-19 pandemic, I gathered multiple perspectives from various sources to complete an accurate picture of the phenomena (Shih, 1998; Casey & Murphy, 2009). I hoped that my analysis would discover the inspiration and common elements that factored into students choosing or not choosing to participate in band class. After transcribing and carefully reading through the interview transcripts, I annotated common sentiments to discover common themes and analyzed those themes.

Survey data were organized into groups of common sentiments and used inductive analysis to derive the frequency at which sentiments were mentioned. I used line-by-line, open coding of all data and then consolidated similar themes and sentiments. Additionally, I was open to words, codes, and themes that did not fit into my ideas of the pandemic-band experience or the data trends from my sources. Coding involves constructing short labels that describe, dissect, and distill the data while preserving essential properties (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Common themes among each cohort were labeled and categorized throughout my investigation and analysis. I chose not to use coding software as the data from the open-ended questions yielded a more thorough and “hands-on” approach to the data, which allowed me to analyze the keywords and trends carefully. Several common themes and patterns arose from both the survey and interview data, and they are captured in chapters four, five, and six, which present band teacher results, band student results, and parent/guardian results respectively. Finally, Chapter Seven discusses the commonalities and differences between the cohorts and presents the data required to answer the sub-research and central research questions.

### **Limitations of the Method**

Although qualitative research has long been accepted as a legitimate research paradigm, it has commonly been criticized for lacking the possibility of finding and creating generalizations

(Roald, 2021) which is a particularly apposite concern for this research study. In this case, generalization refers to the measure of how beneficial the results of a study are for a broader group of people or situation (Creswell & Creswell, 2012), which is, of course, important so that the study has as large of an impact as possible. Fortunately, scholars such as Roald (2021) argue that a variety of possibilities for discovery and generalization exist with its own scientific legitimacy resulting from different qualitative inquiries, reinforcing the possibilities of finding opportunities for generalization within qualitative research. Therefore, the small sample of the province's band population included in this study is still significant because the generalization we form from the data obtained from each band teacher, band student and band parent/guardian of band students is relevant, timely, and applicable to the general population.

Another limitation of qualitative methodology may be the belief that researchers cannot bring objectivity to their research process. Or further, that researchers might bring biases and philosophical assumptions from their own experiences when analyzing data. (Creswell & Creswell, 2012). Qualitative researchers experience the social world we study and we as humans are formed by the world in which we live. Our experiences inform our personal, social, and cultural values and belief systems (Ahern, 1999); however, these values and belief systems should not affect data collection and analysis. One process in which qualitative researchers can account for this is through reflexive practices. Reflexivity requires the researcher to reflect on how their role in the study and their personal background, culture and experiences hold the potential for shaping their interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2012). Reflexive bracketing is one way to demonstrate this qualitative study's trustworthiness (Ahern, 1999). Drew (2004) posits that bracketing is the task of sorting out the qualities that belong to the researcher's experience of the phenomenon. Qualitative researchers can use reflexive bracketing to appropriately understand, incorporate, and set aside personal beliefs and assumptions to reflect participants' experiences (Ahern, 1999). Being reflexive in this study required understanding and accepting my lived experiences and, subsequently, how they shaped my methods of inquiry and analysis (Houghton et al., 2013). I recognize that my positionality as a band teacher with experience and context of the subject area, in addition to teaching before and during the COVID-19 pandemic informed the interview and survey questions. Throughout the analysis process, I was reflexive and used reflexive bracketing while examining all of the data responses, and while I noted similarities and differences from my own experiences, I only considered the new

information that was presented by the research participants. Lastly, in order to avoid leading answers from survey respondents in the student and teacher cohorts, I intentionally did not allow for following up and prompting with these cases.

In addition to reflexivity, several criteria of trustworthiness were applied to minimize bias including confirmability and authenticity (Hays & Singh, 2012; Morrow, 2007). Confirmability refers to the degree to which other researchers can confirm or corroborate any findings (Houghton et al., 2013). This study could invite other researchers to confirm or corroborate any findings as the interview and survey questions I designed would be accessible for other researchers to use in their contexts to gather information for future research if they were to conduct a similar study. Secondly, authenticity requires that all of the realities are represented and that they can help give meaning to the findings (Houghton et al., 2013). Thoughtful consideration of each piece of data in this study provides a true reflection of the pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic experiences as several different viewpoints have been taken into account to provide a holistic perspective of the effects of the pandemic: band teachers, band students and band parents/guardians in five high school band programs.

Another important validation strategy that was used to increase the authority of this research was triangulation. Triangulation is a common strategy used in qualitative case studies and uses several methods to gain information on a given phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013). Triangulation in this study confirmed the interview data and ensured that interviews were complete (Houghton et al., 2013). Creswell (2018) describes triangulation as the process by which the researcher examines evidence from the source and uses it to build a coherent justification for themes. This study was enhanced by the use of triangulation as several pieces of information were gathered from several different sources, including band teachers, band students and band parents/guardians. More specifically, band teachers verified the accuracy of the interview transcripts to ensure the data's credibility.

Creswell (2018) states that themes are established based on converging participant data and perspectives, contributing to the study's validity. Yin (1994) posits that the researcher must consider potential bias in participant responses, inaccuracies due to poor recall, and reflexivity, where responders give the answer they believe the researchers want. Additionally, the subjective nature of the participants' responses can jeopardize the validity attributed to the study (Lang, 2015). My hope is that none of the above were an issue in this study for the anonymous survey



responders, as I trust that they were completing the survey honestly, given that there was no presence of a teacher or myself as the researcher to influence the participant responses. The issue of validation in qualitative research and trust between the researcher and participants is an important aspect that strengthens the qualitative research approach (Lang, 2015). Further, Angen (2000) posits that ethical validation, in which researchers question their underlying moral assumptions, political and ethical implications and the equitable treatment of diverse voices, is imperative to the study's validity. Validity is an ethical relationship with research participants through standards of positioning themselves, participatory discourse, encouraging voices and engaging in self-reflection (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative reliability posits that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (Gibbs, 2007). This can be challenging to achieve in qualitative research because it implies replicability, and rarely are these exact situations duplicated in order to test and achieve reliability (Cohen et al., 2000). In this type of study, reliability would be challenging unless I were to interview the same band teachers, survey the same band students and band parents/guardians again, and receive the same answers. Furthermore, the data would change due to different experiences when I interviewed or surveyed the respondents again. Throughout the interviews, I was mindful of how I prompted further responses and what I shared from my own experiences to avoid influencing responses.

As a researcher, I recognize that there are limitations to the qualitative research method especially concerning the possibility of researcher bias. Through the processes of reflexivity, authenticity, confirmability, and triangulation, all of which contribute to the research's trustworthiness and quality, I have made a concerted effort to account for the effects of researcher bias and influence. In spite of the limitations of the method, qualitative research is the most appropriate approach to this study given that it relies on the lived experiences and narratives of the participants involved. In this respect, the limitations of qualitative research methodology actually serve as a strength as qualitative research is not statistical and it incorporates multiple realities (Rahman, 2017). Further to this point, Flick (2014) states that "qualitative research is interested in analyzing subjective meaning or the social production of issues, events, or practices by collecting non-standardized data and analyzing texts and images rather than number and statistics (p. 542). To connect these ideas, this research study aims to collect and interpret the experiences of many participants, all of whom have various perspectives

on a set of musical practices and program delivery that occurred surrounding the pandemic. As these expressions of experiences cannot and should not be reduced to statistics, the importance of amplifying participant voices reinforces the appropriate use of qualitative methodology for this research.

### **Ethical Considerations**

An essential element of this research study was to apply for and receive ethics approval from the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board and each Saskatchewan School Division for a total of three School Divisions. Of the participating high schools, two were in the same public division, two were in the same Catholic division, and one was a third Catholic school in a different city. Though this study obtained data from adults and vulnerable populations (minors), there was minimal risk to participants. Confidentiality was assured as all participants in the study were referred to with pseudonyms or initials. As I ensured that the survey participants were anonymous, completing and submitting the survey implied their free and informed consent and that they understood the study's participation conditions. Participants understood that their responses may be used in my research presentation, that each surveyed participant would have a pseudonym, and that all identifying information, such as school or teacher's name, would be removed from the report. Additionally, band teachers would not know which students or parents/guardians participated, and participation/non-participation would not have academic consequences. This consideration cannot be underestimated. I recognize that in an academic institution, when rewards such as marks and grades are provided or deducted, this process ensures that participants could participate without any fear or threat of academic advantage or penalty. Each band teacher seemed to enjoy the experience of participating in this process and appreciated that their participation and input were contributing toward a worthy purpose. In doing so, I have made every attempt possible to honour their words and contributions to this important study.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Band Teacher Perspectives**

#### **Context**

This chapter outlines the experiences of five band directors teaching in Central, Southern and Western Saskatchewan cities. When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, schools in Saskatchewan closed, halting in-person band classes for the remainder of the year. Each band teacher discussed their music program experiences pre-pandemic, during the height of restrictions, and in the current post-pandemic climate at the time of data collection for this research in October/November 2022. It is important to note that, despite the lack of restrictions during these interviews, student absences due to ongoing illnesses still constrained attendance in the post-pandemic environment.

The five band directors selected to be interviewed are passionate music educators who oversee established band programs and are deeply engaged with their students. They were chosen because they represented different geographical areas within the province, different denominational school divisions, and different levels of teaching experience. Though they all have unique personalities and approaches to their programs, they shared a passion for persevering through adversity and providing band in whatever capacity possible. To provide the broadest frame of reference, each band teacher chosen must have taught band before the COVID-19 pandemic, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the post-pandemic climate. The interviews took place online and lasted 35-42 minutes. Talking directly to each teacher was essential to allow them to elaborate on many facets of their covid band experiences. All names are anonymized for this study.

#### **Teacher 1: Ms. Green**

##### ***School Demographics***

Ms. Green is in her 24th year teaching and has been at her current school for 16 years. Ms. Green's school serves grades nine to twelve with a population of 1000 students and is located in a large Central Saskatchewan city. Ms. Green teaches 95% music and History 30.

##### ***Teaching Context Before COVID-19***

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Green's band program operated with every band class running all year, alternating each day with wellness, social studies and psychology classes. In addition to band, Ms. Green taught her band students some non-music classes and guitar. She

ran extra-curricular jazz bands, small ensembles, and drumline. Her enrolment in music classes averaged 80-100 students per year. They would perform in three yearly concerts in their school theater, the local music festival, and a few overnight trips to out-of-town music festivals. Ms. Green did not have a formal parent organization, but parents often assisted with fundraising for trips. Ms. Green describes the pre-pandemic band room climate as positive and active with a “friend and team atmosphere.” The band room was open during lunch, and students often came to hang out, practice, or get extra help. Ms. Green believes in having a close connection with neighbouring schools and would often visit and workshop with the younger grades or have the elementary students travel over to sit in with the high school students. The open relationship with neighbouring elementary schools was a fantastic opportunity for the younger students to see and hear the music that the older students could play and ask questions about the music program.

### ***Teaching Context During COVID-19 Restrictions***

In the fall of 2020, students returned to in-person learning in different formats. Ms. Green’s school implemented a quint-semester system<sup>7</sup>, unlike the previous two-semester system. Students took classes for six to seven weeks at a time, significantly limiting the band program. Students sat four meters apart, forcing Ms. Green to divide her students and have half playing and the other half working in the upper level of the band room. Student engagement from the upper level consisted of computer work or playing on drum pads. Students also used masks when they were not playing and had bell masks on their instruments. Ms. Green described the effect of Covid as “no hanging out, no team-building activities, and we could not do “circle talk”<sup>8</sup> since it was too dangerous.” Later in the year, COVID-19 worsened, and schools adhered to more restrictions. The bands shrunk more as students attended school on a hybrid schedule, rotating days by their last names. Ms. Green stated:

That really split up the senior band; I would only see half at a time. But they could all fit and play at once, so kind of better in a way. I got to see my nines and tens again in June, so we did one outdoor concert. Grade 10’s adapted a bit of playing some jazz band music to kind of make that more fun since I had a drumset player and a bass player.

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<sup>7</sup> The quint semester system split courses into five semesters. Through intensive study, students took only two classes per day and completed each course in six weeks.

<sup>8</sup> Circle Talk was an activity created by Ms. Green where she and her students would sit in a circle at the end of class and have discussions on a variety of subjects ranging from favourite colors to mental health.

Ms. Green utilized Google Classroom for recorded playing assignments, assigned listening assignments through YouTube and used an online theory program, not finding either program overly beneficial in the long term.

Restrictions continued in the fall of 2021 as Ms. Green's school implemented abbreviated semesters called the quarter<sup>9</sup> system. Ms. Green's school division recognized the importance of having grade nine and ten bands run all year, but the quarter system still disrupted the senior students. She described the senior band as:

Scheduled at lunch because of the odd quarter schedules, which was really difficult. They had lunch quarters one, three and four; quarter two just came once a week to keep playing. Concerts were back on with the November audience allowed to be 50% capacity, so the seniors did get to play in all the concerts. The jazz band and drumline were back in a morning extracurricular spot which was also a good improvement. Students still couldn't hang out at lunch because of the senior band being at lunch, which was a big downfall to that kind of welcoming team-building atmosphere. Being a community of band students was not as good again last year, but at the end of the year, we got one trip to the University of Saskatchewan, which was a fun way to end the year.

Ms. Green values the opportunities to build a music community and was often frustrated and sad that scheduling and safety restrictions made it impossible to achieve that community.

There were no opportunities to collaborate with neighbouring elementary schools during the 2020-2021 school year. Elementary band programs in Ms. Green's school division had been temporarily dismantled, with elementary band directors redeployed to other subject areas. The lack of grade eight band programming directly affected the grade nine band enrolment at Ms. Green's school, as those who chose band were primarily beginners who had not played very much during their grade seven and eight years. Ms. Green shared that not connecting with the neighbouring schools had a "negative impact." Further, some grade eight teachers "didn't even want to meet on Zoom" to let Ms. Green meet the students. Despite the lack of contact, Ms. Green was thrilled to have at least a small grade nine band in the fall of 2021.

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<sup>9</sup> The quarter semester system split courses into four semesters.

### ***Teaching Context Post-Covid Restrictions***

Ms. Green's current band enrolment is 64 students, which she considers a more "normal number for my school." Grade nine enrolment is back to 31, which bodes well for the program's future. Other than low enrolment disallowing jazz studies, Ms. Green's current schedule is the same as her pre-pandemic schedule. The technology Ms. Green used, such as SmartMusic and Breezin' Thru theory, served a purpose at the time. Still, she said her students "didn't like it," and she felt it was "difficult to handle." She has discontinued using both. Due to having lower enrolment numbers and lacking balanced instrumentation, Ms. Green used *Flex-Band*<sup>10</sup> music during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and is still using it. The "ultimate goal" is avoiding Flex-Band music and returning to the previously selected repertoire.

When asked if her assessment has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Green explains that her band students were using Google Classroom pre-covid, so she is still using it; however, how she assesses students has changed:

My marking of recorded tests got a little bit more lenient because kids were going through some struggles just to be able to practice and perform those things. I sometimes overlooked things that I might have been more strict about before. So, I don't know if I'll get back to the way I marked before. I still feel like students are still struggling in some ways. That leniency may remain, and you just want them to stay in band, and you don't want to deter them by clamping down on every single wrong note, and every missed tonguing, and all of that. So just more encouraging in the marking. I had them all doing research into the pieces for concert announcing. And I'm going to keep that because when students were up above, that was an assignment where they would all do five-sentence information about each piece. I liked that they all did that; they could all potentially be the concert announcer because it was already prepared.

Ms. Green believes she has also adjusted the pace at which she is teaching and explained:

We're probably not moving quite as quickly and getting grade nines last year that hadn't played for a year and a half or upwards of two years and some outright beginners. Just starting back at the beginning and maybe not stretching as far. They may not be playing

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<sup>10</sup> *Flex-Band* music is a series of concert band arrangements for grades 2-3 bands who need flexible instrumentation.

as high-level repertoire as they normally would be playing at that grade. But I do feel like we'll be catching up pretty quickly because kids are so adaptable, and they are learning really quickly, it seems. Last year's nines were such a small group they almost caught up to where they should be. Because, with that few, with 15 students, you can walk up to the music stand and tell them the fingering, right, like many times throughout the class, and the rest are still okay sitting and waiting. And they're all different levels. I forgot what it was like pre-pandemic with that many kids and then coming on with such different levels of ability.

Ms. Green's flexibility and understanding of students' struggles during this time no doubt helped her students to continue wanting to be in band and make music despite the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected many touring and performance opportunities for music programs, and Ms. Green's school was no exception. Previous to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Green felt that trips motivated students to continue in band. Still, after experiencing her program with no trips, she believes that the lower enrolment numbers are "strictly due to Covid restrictions affecting the elementary enrolment and that there weren't any students who quit because there wasn't a trip." They are planning a trip for spring, and the kids seem excited to go, but they didn't know about the trip when they signed up for band this fall. Ms. Green believes this experience has brought students closer and helped them to love music even more. Ms. Green received unwavering support from her team of administrators when looking into scheduling band and continuing band in her school. She emphasized that she felt "really lucky to have that accommodation" as they continually sought creative ways for band to continue and for the students to keep making music.

## **Teacher 2: Mr. Black**

### ***School Demographics***

Mr. Black is in his 35th year of teaching and has been at his current school for 13 years. Mr. Black's school serves grades nine to twelve, with a population of 850. It is in Central Saskatchewan and contains a mixed to upper socioeconomic contingent with a growing

population of new Canadians. Mr. Black's school is one of two schools in the city that offer the International Baccalaureate Program.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Black teaches music full-time.

### ***Teaching Context Before COVID-19***

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Mr. Black's band program operated every band class running all year, alternating days with classes such as science and International Baccalaureate programs. In addition to band, Mr. Black taught guitar and has a teaching partner for the larger bands. He ran extra-curricular jazz bands and small ensembles. His enrolment in music classes averaged 150 students per year. They would perform in four yearly concerts in their school theatre, the local music festival, and a few overnight trips to out-of-town music festivals. Mr. Black did not have a formal parent organization. Mr. Black describes the pre-pandemic band room climate as "generally positive and a little entitled at times, and the kids worked hard." Mr. Black sees the benefit of having a close connection with neighbouring schools. He would often go out (with his teaching partner) to visit neighbouring elementary schools or to create opportunities for his high school students to perform with the neighbouring elementary students.

### ***Teaching Context During COVID-19 Restrictions***

In March 2020, Mr. Black's students were three days away from a band trip and a joint concert with the University of Saskatchewan Wind Orchestra. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of both events, devastating students and sending them home for the remainder of the year. In the fall of 2020, Mr. Black participated in a discussion with School Division administrators who were making decisions regarding whether the high school band would proceed in the fall. Mr. Black proclaimed that high school band teachers would do whatever it took to have the students continue making music. He had a pivotal role in the decision to allow instrumental music to continue. In the fall of 2020, Mr. Black's school adopted the quint system, seeing his students for a much shorter period. He was set up well for four-meter spacing as they could use their theatre and had two band teachers. Students attended according to their surname, and Mr. Black indicated that "they never met as a full band; sort of strange doing that, but we were able to keep playing." Because of the quint system, many Grade 12 students found

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<sup>11</sup> The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (Grades 11 to 12) is designed for students aged 16 to 19 who are academically motivated and desire a rigorous curriculum, often as a preparation for post-secondary study.



themselves without full classes, with band being at the end of the year quint. Mr. Black explained that many students wanted to “work or do other things, so they cut out many of their electives, and band was one of them.” In the fall of 2021, Mr. Black's school adopted the quarter system, allowing his grade nine and ten students to resume all-year band, while his senior band had band for the second half of the year during two consecutive two quarters. Students played in small ensembles, and the senior students could choose a “passion project” in which they got to try something new and present it to the class. Mr. Black stated that he felt “it was sort of neat to have band every day for half a year, and it was cool to see the growth that the kids took.” However, he still believes after 35 years of teaching band, the best practice is seeing them all year.

### ***Teaching Context Post-Covid Restrictions***

Mr. Black’s school is currently back to a two-semester system, and enrolment is at 130, which is reasonably consistent with the pre-pandemic enrolment numbers. A newfound gratitude has emerged within Mr. Black’s band program as he cannot “get over how many kids say thank you at the end of class.” Few of his students have been on a band trip, and they are “looking forward to it.” Students consistently play below pre-pandemic ability due to the learning deficit during elementary band and abbreviated high school semesters. Mr. Black and his teaching partner continue working on getting them “caught up.” The smaller enrolment numbers last year allowed for faster growth than this year, as more students need more intensive support. Mr. Black finds it interesting how the current grade nine band had a spotty grade eight band experience and is more behind than last year’s grade nines, who completely missed grade eight. Mr. Black continues to adjust repertoire choices to reflect students' playing ability and has been fortunate to have good balance and not to need *Flex-Band* music. Mr. Black has been a SmartMusic<sup>12</sup> user for many years and has started using Google Classroom<sup>13</sup> for recorded assessments. Google Classroom allows for feedback and enables students to resubmit the assignment to improve their grades. Students who choose to play their assignment in person still have the opportunity to do so.

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<sup>12</sup> SmartMusic is a web-based music practice tool which features built-in musical scores and exercises that students can access solo or through an assignment from their teachers.

<sup>13</sup> Google Classroom is designed to assist educators in streamlining assignments, boosting collaboration, and fostering communication.

When asked about his current teaching pace, Mr. Black asserts that he is much more relaxed and has worked hard to stay positive through these difficult times. Mr. Black decided early on in the COVID-19 pandemic that since there were already many reasons for students to quit band, "they didn't need the band director on them night and day." Thus, he took a more relaxed approach to several aspects of the class. They didn't do any concerts, which assisted the relaxed feeling. Mr. Black would record students on his iPhone to share with parents and, at one point, hired a professional to record some playing and put together a "really nice band concert." At the time of this interview, Mr. Black was preparing his students for a concert and finding himself needing to adjust his expectations with the grade nines and give them a more accessible piece. After he distributed the new music, "you could just see all their shoulders come down, and when I asked them, 'how do you like that?' they were very thankful." When reflecting on the time when concerts were not allowed, Mr. Black felt it took "some pressure off" and is unsure if people were missing them "as much as we thought they might have missed them." Conversely, when Mr. Black's band students played in the local festival during the Spring of 2022, more parents showed up to watch than ever before.

Band directors such as Mr. Black were able to have experiences they may not have had the time to experience in the past due to school closures and the hiatus of extracurricular activities. Mr. Black reflects fondly on attending and creating professional development opportunities through Zoom with other colleagues. These opportunities started as small meetings, and eventually grew to 90 attendees, creating a strong connection and community among isolated band directors.

### **Teacher 3: Mr. Gray**

#### ***School Demographics***

Mr. Gray is in his 24th year teaching and has been at his current school for 24 years. Mr. Gray's school is the only Catholic High School serving grades eight to twelve. It is located in Western Saskatchewan, with a population of 1000 students, a mixed socioeconomic contingent, and a growing new Canadian population. Mr. Gray teaches music full-time.

#### ***Teaching Context Before COVID-19***

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Mr. Gray's band program operated with each band class running all year, every second day. The Grade 10-12 senior band met before school as an "early bird." Mr. Gray's job assignment included all elementary and high school band levels. He

ran extra-curricular jazz bands, small ensembles, jazz combos, a pep band, a symphony club, a composer's guild, a low brass ensemble and a woodwind quintet. Mr. Gray asserts this was "an insane amount of opportunities, really." His enrolment in band classes averaged 220-230 students per year. They would perform in two concerts per year and two festivals per year. Mr. Gray did not have a formal parent organization, but parents would gather to help plan special events such as more extensive trips to the United States. Upon reflection, Mr. Gray describes the pre-pandemic band room climate as:

Such a welcoming room, just like a safe welcoming room. I think back, we had a couch in here, kids would hang out. Someone would be watching the video on the screen about like Neapolitan sixth chords and other kids playing their trombone in the corner and other groups trying to compose, just pure joy. I guess to an outsider, it was chaotic, it's noise, but in the band realm, it was just joy. Like so many kids just investigating anything, you know. And to build that back, I, like now, a few kids come in, they eat lunch in here, but it's more the meek students. They come in, and they are so respectful, and they just eat their lunch, and it's honestly not noisy. That's a little sad.

Prior to the covid restrictions, which resulted in schools not being allowed to mingle, Mr. Gray created little opportunity for high school band students to engage with elementary students. To some extent, Mr. Gray felt there was less wonder from younger students about what band in high school would be like because he had taught in his school division for 24 years.

### ***Teaching Context During COVID-19 Restrictions***

As was the case with Ms. Green and Mr. Black, the government sent Mr. Gray and his students home in March 2020. Many students would log in to Zoom when Mr. Gray was required to be online. Eventually, that dwindled, and Google Classroom became the primary mode of communication for those wanting to be engaged. In the fall of 2020, Mr. Gray's upper administration "had a passion for keeping the kids playing." They often met to decide how to keep kids playing and were willing to use whatever means possible. This focus included renting a circus tent so students could play together outside, purchasing 80 plexiglass divider shields so students could continue playing inside, and using their community theatre for rehearsals. Mr. Gray's students did not need to use bell masks as their spacing was sufficient. Mr. Gray felt the administration took very "good care" of their music program throughout the COVID-19

pandemic as his students could continue playing the entire time, unlike the experiences in other school divisions.

Despite the playing opportunities, students were often away, and Mr. Gray posted rehearsals to Google Classroom. Students who would miss weeks at a time found this to be helpful. Additionally, they posted rehearsal slides for those at home to play along from home. Other technologies used were theory programs such as Noteflight<sup>14</sup> and Soundcheck<sup>15</sup>. Students also recorded their practice sessions and submitted them to Google Classroom. Prescribed practice sessions include critical parts of a rehearsal: long tones, lip slurs, rhythmic activities, and scale work. Mr. Gray kept the repertoire selection the same as the difficulty level. He also sought out music with themes of interconnectedness and anything that relates humans to humans during such a disconnected time. Some of Mr. Gray's assessment practices changed; however, he believes the COVID-19 pandemic was not the impetus for the change. Specifically, when describing the final exam for his band class, Mr. Gray asserts that his final assessment evolved to suit the band class more than to fit the school's exam schedule. In other words, he created a final exam to reflect more on the musical learning taking place rather than for the sake of giving an exam.

Performances in Mr. Gray's band program were infrequent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar to Ms. Green and Mr. Black, there were no trips or concerts in the early months. Initially, Mr. Gray shared recordings and photos of the groups with parents through Google Classroom. This process evolved into a video-recorded performance, and students in full concert dress in the local theatre still with no audience. The spacing required for students impacted their playing and performing ability, and Mr. Gray noticed that:

Most high school students really kind of shelled up, when there's no one beside you, when the next player is two meters or three meters away, they would barely play; they would just really be shy because they had no support. If you're sitting in the clarinet section, and there's a person on each side, then you're just a part of it. But when that goes away, and you're on an island, you want to protect yourself.

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<sup>14</sup> Noteflight is an online music writing application that lets musicians create, view, print and hear professional quality music notation in a web browser.

<sup>15</sup> SoundCheck is an audio test system that can virtually measure audio devices.

Despite the disconnect with playing confidence, Mr. Gray feels his band program was one of the only opportunities students had to connect with their peers. He posits that band does an excellent job of bringing students together and explains, “no one's a sideline person; everyone's a part of it. For humanity, a band brings people together.”

### ***Teaching Context Post-Covid Restrictions***

Mr. Gray's current teaching schedule is similar to his pre-covid schedule, but there are some changes. He is now teaching a class over the lunch hour, which he asserts could contribute to fewer students hanging out at lunch. He invites those who still want to be in the room, even while he is teaching. His assessment practices continue to evolve. Mr. Gray asserts that he does not know:

If it's compassion or empathy, but like anyone playing an instrument in any regard, he just gets my respect. Oh, probably pre-pandemic, I was more interested in tuning and articulation; are you phrasing it right? Now, I'm like, props for playing an instrument.

Mr. Gray finds there is still a lot of sickness going around, so things are not back to the way it was before the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked about his pre-pandemic pace compared to the current pace, Mr. Gray describes the latter as “frantic” with “too many extracurriculars, running around, too many pieces.” And now, in the post-pandemic climate, he describes his pace as “controlled with purpose and meaning” with “just a little more thought behind everything we're doing.” Mr. Gray does have some small trips and festivals planned for this year to ease back into “the regular.”

Contrary to the lack of collaboration with his elementary and high school band students before the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Gray has focused on this year's connection between the cohorts. At his beginner band clinic, 20 senior students volunteered to be a part of it. It is now more important to him for the elementary and high school band students to have a connection as he views the older students as excellent role models for the younger students.

### **Teacher 4: Ms. White**

#### ***School Demographics***

Ms. White is in her seventh year of teaching and has been at her current school for seven years. Ms. White's school serves grades nine to twelve with a population of 800 students in a Southern Saskatchewan City. It consists of a mixed to lower socio-economic contingency and a

growing population of new Canadians, including many displaced Ukrainians who arrived during the summer of 2022. Ms. White teaches music full-time.

### ***Teaching Context Before COVID-19***

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. White directed one high school band of 75 students between grades nine to twelve students and taught band in two elementary schools. She saw her high school band three times a week before school in what she refers to as an “early bird class.” Additionally, some of her students were in an extracurricular chamber ensemble and a zone jazz class<sup>16</sup>, which consisted of selected students from the four high schools in her school division. Ms. White’s students performed often and regularly traveled, squeezing in a band trip in January 2020 and a festival in early March 2020. The band parent association Ms. White is associated with consists of parents from all of the high schools in her school division; therefore, this parent organization assists all four schools. Ms. White described the band room as having a “fun, team atmosphere” before the COVID-19 pandemic and felt that it was a place where everyone felt “safe and supported.” Ms. White had regular contact with her neighbouring elementary schools as the “area band” rehearsals would be at Ms. White’s school, allowing her to interact with the students before high school.

### ***Teaching Context During COVID-19 Restrictions***

Ms. White was able to start the fall of 2020 with her students playing outdoors until the weather grew too cold. After that, she implemented music history, theory, and SmartMusic, with recordings completed at home, as her school division did not allow instruments to be played indoors. Ms. White only saw her high school students once a week because the size of the bands did not permit them to be together safely for their usual amount of time, and her school was on a hybrid attendance schedule based on students' last names; she saw her elementary students even less. Ms. White spent over 100 hours piecing together individual videos of each of her students playing a piece of music to create a virtual video and is adamant that she will never do that again. Students in Ms. White’s school started playing again in the fall of 2021 with slit face masks, instrument bell masks and in small groups that could distance themselves safely. Students continued to be split into smaller groups and could not meet as often as in pre-pandemic times. Once students played again, Ms. White did not continue using SmartMusic or an online theory

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<sup>16</sup> The zone jazz class was made of students from four Catholic high schools who met twice per week all year.

program, as neither she nor her students liked it. Her repertoire choice reflected the students' abilities and the frequency of rehearsals. Still, she found *Flex-Band* music was not necessary anymore as instrumentation remained relatively consistent with band pieces scored for a full band. Ms. White explained that she:

Didn't actually find that I had to. For the grade nines, I definitely had to lower my expectations in terms of the repertoire that I picked for them. And the whole ensemble playing together at first, well, we had to go back. With my tens and elevens, we went down one grade level, and they picked it up really fast.

Ms. White's assessment consisted of recordings at home; however, her grading remained consistent. Their concerts consisted of virtual or live-streamed performances, followed by the first in-person concert in May of 2022, where friends and family could watch.

### ***Teaching Context Post-Covid Restrictions***

Ms. White's band program enrolment is currently 73 students, which pleases her. She now has two bands at her high school instead of the one before. This increase means she cannot fit as much elementary school in her schedule. They are planning a band trip in the spring, and because her students did not know if they would be traveling, she believes that the lack of traveling did not impact her enrolment numbers. Ms. White describes her current pace as "crazier than ever," which she attributes to not being used to the fast "pre-pandemic" pace. When asked what positive outcomes resulted from Covid, she believes her students have learned to appreciate their musical and social opportunities and "not to take things for granted." Further, she said:

They really missed being together, like just playing in the same room or sitting beside their friend they haven't seen or played with in a while. I definitely think they missed performing, doing those concerts for their family and showing off all of their hard work.

Students in Ms. White's school division are still required to have bell masks on their instruments. Consistent with all band five teachers in this study, Ms. White's ensembles are experiencing constant absences due to illness and ongoing virus transmission.

### **Teacher 5: Mr. Brown**

#### ***School Demographics***

Mr. Brown is in year 24 of teaching band, and this is his eighth year at his current school. Mr. Brown's school serves grades nine to twelve, with a population of 650. It is located in a

Southern Saskatchewan city, contains a mixed socio-economic contingent, and has a high population of new Canadians. Mr. Brown asserts that 50-70% of his band students are Filipino. Mr. Brown teaches music full-time.

### ***Teaching Context Before COVID-19***

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Brown taught four credit band classes, including concert and jazz bands. The concert bands consisted of a combined grade nine and ten band and a combined grade 11 and 12 band. Each group rehearsed before school twice a week and one noon hour. The jazz band course included students from four high schools who met twice weekly after school for two hours. He also worked with neighbourhood elementary school students when they would rehearse at his school. During this time, he would assist the elementary teacher by pulling students out for extra help or checking that instruments were working correctly. Mr. Brown's band enrolment was 120 students, and he believes his contact with grade six to eight students greatly benefited his enrolment. Mr. Brown's students performed "tons and tons," from fall retreats to concerts for families at schools to several music festivals throughout the year. Mr. Brown describes his band room as a "safe place" where "students are always welcome."

### ***Teaching Context During COVID-19 Restrictions***

Like Ms. White, Mr. Brown's students stopped playing in the Spring of 2020, and no one was permitted to play anything until the fall of 2021. They were still allowed to have a credit band class, but Mr. Brown taught more of a general music class focusing on theory, history, and Smart Music. He also offered his students upwards of 40 optional private Zoom lessons weekly to supplement the class time that they were not permitted to play. Mr. Brown facilitated these lessons both during and outside of regular school hours.

### ***Teaching Context Post-Covid Restrictions***

Mr. Brown's enrolment remains consistent with 120 band students, and his schedule is back to how it was before the COVID-19 pandemic began. Even though his high school has shrunk considerably due to French immersion students now opting to move to a closer school offering this program, his retention in band is strong. The band room remains an open and safe space; at the time of this interview, five students in the band room had a spare, visiting and enjoying each other's company. Mr. Brown has discontinued SmartMusic and online theory platforms because he believes "nothing else compares to live music." Regarding repertoire selection, Mr. Brown finds the younger students need more accessible music, but his senior



students are thriving at pre-covid ability level. Mr. Brown's assessment practices, his setting of high expectations, and his task-oriented rehearsal structure have not changed. Mr. Brown's school division students must still have bell masks on their instruments. In keeping consistent with every teacher interviewed, Mr. Brown also believes the lack of traveling did not impact enrolment. He believes that the COVID-19 pandemic was an effective way of discovering the most dedicated students. Mr. Brown is experiencing many absences due to illness but is thrilled to still make music in person. Despite the dynamic COVID-19 pandemic rules and scheduling disruptions, Mr. Brown continues to be passionate about making music. He speaks with energy and excitement about playing instruments in person again.

### **Common Themes**

Despite the geographical, personnel and administrative differences between each high school in this study, similar themes emerged from individual responses.

#### ***Less Student Contact Time and Smaller Student Cohorts***

It would have been impossible to recognize the band programs discussed in this chapter as "traditional" during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the 2020-2021 school year, the first full school year with restrictions, band students and teachers at each high school experienced a variety of disruptions that impacted their programs. The most significant disruption was hybrid scheduling that required different cohorts of students to attend school on alternate days. This created less student contact and significantly smaller band classes. Additionally, quint and quad semesters, in which band lasted only six to eight weeks, left gaps of 18 months between band classes. Lastly, two high school band programs could not play instruments in-person for an entire year.

Mr. Gray remarked on the 2020-2021 year: "it didn't even look like band to me." In the 2021-2022 school year, students played more often; however, most schedules remained different from the pre-covid routine, and many senior-level band students were still in an abbreviated semester system. Every band teacher I interviewed felt the impact of separation and lack of community on students. Mr. Black lamented that "they never met as a full band, which was strange," but he was thankful "the band was able to keep playing." Ms. Green lamented losing "circle talks," where she would ask questions ranging from her student's favourite colour to how they felt on a particular day. She relied on these moments to build community and understand her students' feelings. Further, Mr. Gray missed seeing his students each day in the "safe and

welcoming room” he provided at lunch for the “insane amount of opportunities” provided, which he described as “pure joy.”

An open-door policy existed in each band room. Specifically, Ms. Green and Mr. Gray mourned the loss of community and seeing students come in to “hang out.” Before Covid, Ms. Green felt there was a “friend and team atmosphere” in her band room during each noon hour and is striving for that to return by allowing students into parts of the band room at lunch despite a coinciding class. She does feel like there was “a different kind of bonding with the smaller groups of students,” and “even though they were separated at times, going through that shared experience has brought some of them closer together.” Since returning to regular programming this fall, Ms. White has observed how much the students missed each other and being together in her band room. A band class is a close community of music-makers; everyone is impacted when the community is split.

### ***Responses To Government-Required Protocols***

Some high schools used instrument bell covers with government-required four-meter spacing, while others only followed the spacing requirements. Mr. Black put “stickers on the floor” as a visual guide for students so they would stay apart at the appropriate distance. This physical separation was unlike anything band students had experienced before. Mr. Gray noticed that the physical separation of students by several meters within the band setup took away their confidence. He felt that the students demonstrated that “without a person on each side of you, you want to protect yourself.” His students felt “like an island” and lost the ability to play with confidence. At times, the students were “barely playing,” and Mr. Gray explained that it broke his heart to see his students so hesitant. Mr. Brown and Ms. White taught a more general music class, and students lost the ability to make music together in person, diminishing the community atmosphere. The desire to renew the music student community is so vital for Ms. Green and Mr. Gray that they currently allow students to be in the band room while teaching other classes.

### ***Relationships With Neighbouring Schools***

The lack of connection between Ms. Green and Mr. Black's high schools with their neighbouring elementary schools during 2020-2021 affected their 2021-2022 enrolment. Mr. Black and Ms. Green had regular contact with future students in grade eight, and Ms. Green believed there was a “huge negative impact not being allowed to connect with the neighbouring schools.” Despite the lack of connection, she is thrilled to have the small class of grade nine

students she teaches. Ms. Green asserts that the students who did not have band in grade eight that showed up for grade nine demonstrate a great deal of “resilience and persistence,” She describes them as a “strong and dedicated group.” Mr. Brown, Ms. White, and Mr. Gray did not share the same experience as they teach elementary band and continued to connect with their future students, and their grade nine enrolment remained consistent.

### ***Supportive Administration***

In every band program, upper administration entrusted their band teachers to deliver music education rather than cancel band classes. When meeting with his decision-making central office administrators, Mr. Black influenced their decision for all high schools in his school division to continue, as he assured them that band classes could run safely. Within the school setting, Ms. Green felt that she had “really supportive administration, always trying to find ways to make the band schedule work and recognizing the importance of frequent instruction and seeing students throughout the year.” The trust Ms. Green and Mr. Black’s administrators instilled in them to follow the government protocols for instrumental music and keep students safe was greatly appreciated. Mr. Gray felt “taken care of” as his administration rented outdoor circus tents for playing outdoors and provided plexiglass shields for indoor playing. He explained that “they had a passion for keeping kids playing, and he was pleasantly surprised by their intense motivation.” Further, he felt that “it was so positive at every meeting as administrators consistently asked how they could continue to accomplish what was needed to keep kids playing.” Despite Mr. Brown and Ms. White being unable to play instruments, their administration allowed them to continue teaching music to their students in a way that worked for everyone until they could play again.

### ***Flexibility and Adaptability***

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, with so much uncertainty for music programs, each of the five band teachers incorporated many changes to instruction. They all demonstrated passion and commitment to continuing music education and, in the best interests of their students, were willing to do anything to make music happen. Ms. Green adjusted her repertoire selection by adding new music genres, creative assignments, and jazz band instruments to class. Mr. Black incorporated more small ensembles and passion projects in his classes. For example, a grade-twelve trumpet player decided to learn the clarinet and felt quite

accomplished. Another student did a “10-minute presentation on how music is good for your brain and what it does to your brain.”

### ***Assessment Adjustments***

For Mr. Black and Ms. Green, the abbreviated quint system delayed instruction between grades by close to 18 months and adjusting assessment expectations was critical. Mr. Black believes that Google Classroom helped to allow feedback and improvement opportunities. Some students continued to choose live testing, and occasionally he felt that he turned into “a bit of a counsellor” for the struggling students, “and that’s okay.” Ms. Green and Mr. Gray asserted they were more lenient on technical aspects they would have been more concerned about before the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike the other band teachers, Mr. Brown stated that his assessment practices were similar to those before the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Repertoire Adjustments***

Repertoire selection was challenging during Covid restrictions and continued to be complex. Mr. Brown continued adjusting his younger students' repertoire but felt that they were catching up quickly. Ms. Green prefers not to use Flex music; once she has a better balance of instruments, she will choose music with more parts. Mr. Gray posits that “it is going to be a six-or-seven-year” process of rebuilding skills lost during the gap years and is prepared to “play easier music.” Overall, he is excited to still make music with students and often chooses music with themes of human connectedness. Each teacher emphasized the challenges of finding appropriate repertoire for the varied skill levels in each ensemble.

### ***Negotiating the Use of Technology***

For each teacher interviewed, technology was a valuable tool during their most challenging times, but they report currently using it in a different capacity. Since they were not permitted to play in person, Mr. Brown and Ms. White integrated new computer programs, Smart Music and Breezin’ Thru Theory, to replace in-person playing and engage students. Additionally, Mr. Brown spent 20 hours weekly giving private lessons through Zoom. Similarly, to engage families at home, Ms. White spent more than 100 hours piecing together a video of her students playing individually to create a group performance. Mr. Black continued with Smart Music, explored Kami<sup>17</sup> and Google Classroom, and currently only uses Google Classroom. Mr.

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<sup>17</sup> Kami is a music distribution and storage program.

Gray's theory program of choice was Noteflight, in addition to having his students record teacher-prescribed practice sessions for Google Classroom. He has continued to assign and assess these practice sessions as he finds it “an absolute treat and joy,” and he feels it adds “validity to their practice sessions.” Ms. Green allowed her students to do concert critiques of YouTube concerts since there were no live performances to attend. As Ms. White explains, technology cannot work long-term until everyone has equal access to the necessary equipment. There was a “point where schools had to give out their laptops to those families that did not have any technology.” Like the others, she is no longer using SmartMusic. For each band program, technology provided opportunities for students to continue their musical education; nevertheless, as Mr. Brown emphasized, “we would all rather play live and in person; nothing compares.”

### ***Missing The Experience of Live Performances and Tours***

Each pre-Covid band program included many performances at school, local music festivals, and festivals out of town. None of these occurred during Covid, but students continued to show up to band class. Each teacher found creative ways to engage an audience through live-streamed concerts or outdoor performances; for instance, Ms. Green “did a quick outdoor concert in case everything changed again.” Additionally, Mr. Black hired a professional to record his students playing, Ms. White learned to create a compilation of student videos into a virtual performance, and Mr. Gray recorded performances and shared them on Google Classroom. All five band directors sought ways to engage families with their musicians’ accomplishments.

Every teacher interviewed stated they did not believe the lack of trips affected student enrolment. Ms. Green explained this inconsequence, “I don’t think that impacted anything negatively; nobody asked at all about trips.” For the first time since 2019, Ms. Green organized a day trip in June of 2022 to the University of Saskatchewan, which was “definitely a fun way to end the year” as students were not expecting to go anywhere and were immensely grateful. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Black noticed that his students “were somewhat entitled regarding travel,” feeling that some felt they deserved a big band trip each year. This year he observes his students as “happy to go anywhere”; when they selected band this year, they did not know if they would be traveling. Mr. Gray shared Mr. Black’s perspective and remarked, “honestly, I thought it was a bigger motivator for students because when trips went away, the kids stayed.” I thought to myself, “Guys, there are no trips,” and “they’re still here.” Mr. Brown stated that since his younger students had never been on a band trip, it could not have influenced

their decision-making. Additionally, Ms. White feels that her enrolment is a “tiny bit higher” and believes that if she “told the kids we weren’t going on a trip this year, it wouldn’t affect them.” The COVID-19 pandemic took away the opportunity for traditional performances and travel, witnessing unchanged enrolment with the loss of travel has been an enlightening discovery for all five band directors.

### ***Adjustment of Pace***

Each band teacher was forthcoming about how the lack of traditional performances reduced the pressure that accompanies teaching band. They found their pace slower and more relaxed than their pre-pandemic pace. Mr. Black believes that he is now “much more relaxed and much more giving” rather than “shoot first and ask questions later.” Moreover, he reflects fondly on his time online with colleagues where he could focus on the community, specifically with his trumpet peers, and professional development that he may not have had time for otherwise. Ms. White is the newest of the five band teachers and finds the current pace “crazier than ever.” One could argue that this is because she had not yet experienced the day-to-day pace of a high school band teacher. Mr. Gray describes his pre-pandemic life as “frantic” and is purposefully trying to continue a “more controlled and meaningful pace, with more thought behind everything we are doing.” Along with teaching band comes an enormous amount of organization and planning for performances. Each teacher recognized how removing that pressure affected them out of work, and they all continue to seek a balance in their current landscape.

### **Summary**

Based on the experiences each participant described during the Zoom interviews, it became clear that band teachers were passionate about finding ways to continue quality music education with their students by any means necessary. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, band teachers have constantly been adjusting to new schedules, new restrictions, and a high level of absenteeism. The participants were forthcoming about the difficulty they experienced and how pleased they were that their willingness to adapt paid off in their current program enrolment. Their band rooms remain a vibrant, safe space full of student musicians who enjoy making music and being part of a welcoming community.

Despite the massive COVID-19 restrictions on band programs, the five band teachers interviewed learned a great deal about themselves, their students, and the administrative decision-makers in their schools. As a result of government-required protocols, teachers

negotiated less student contact, smaller cohorts and the absence of live performances and band trips. In some cases, the relationship with their neighbouring elementary schools ceased. With the help of supportive administration, the five band teachers could be flexible and adaptable with their pedagogy, negotiating new ways to use technology to keep playing while also continuing to engage families. According to current enrolment numbers, their creative, perseverant, and sincere efforts created meaningful student experiences that positively influenced retention.

## Chapter Five

### Band Student Data Survey Presentation

#### Introduction

Another critical perspective to investigate when researching post-pandemic band enrolment is that of the students who participated in band during the height of restrictions. To understand how the COVID-19 pandemic affected band students, those surveyed were from grades nine to twelve and began playing in band before the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Band Student Information

109 students from five high schools in three cities completed the student survey. Of those students, 41 were in grade twelve, 50 were in grade eleven, 16 were in grade ten, and two were in grade nine. Most participating students started band in grade six and played for at least four years. In addition, every student stated that theirs is a credited class, meeting at a minimum of two-three times per week for the duration of the school year. Each student was impacted by the dramatic changes of the COVID-19 pandemic-band experience in some capacity. As such, many survey responses described how students felt about their COVID-19 pandemic-band experience. Student responses provide context for the reader to understand their lived experiences, what students missed about their pre-Covid band experience, what they enjoy most about having things ‘back to normal,’ and how being a member of the band impacts their lives.

Undoubtedly, the most straightforward and unified answers emerged when students were asked why they chose to take band in the 2022-2023 school year. Several students made general statements, including: “because I like it;” “because I wanted to;” “because it’s fun;” and “because I enjoy it.” However, the overwhelming majority had specific reasons why including: “I love playing music with others;” “band is awesome;” “I really love music, despite all that has happened, ” and “I take pride in the opportunity to be able to play an instrument, and I enjoy the people I work with.” Specifically, only three students stated their parents had made them, and three responded with the wish to go on a band trip. An essential part of the student survey was how it encouraged students to explain the “why” in detail.

#### Community and Friendships

Throughout the survey, students had multiple opportunities to describe certain aspects of their band experiences. When asked to share what they find meaningful about participating in



band, most student responses evolved around friendship, connection, teamwork, building community, and “working as a group to create art.” F.F. stated, “while it isn’t as academically as intensive as other classes, I think it’s still really important to participate in band because it focuses more on cooperation and working together as a band.” C.D. described each bandmate as “a cog in a machine that works together to create a new thing.” M.M. enjoys “working along with others and making beautiful music.” Additionally, S.G. believes “music has an incredibly powerful ability to show emotions and connect people.” A.F. ’s summary also resonates as they described band as an opportunity “to express creative freedom in a space full of people looking to do the same thing and the endless support for band coming from teachers and friends.” Students consistently explained that the relationships they formed in band meant a great deal to them. Recognizing the band community's positive impact on students' confidence and mental well-being is important.

Most surveyed students described their band class as their main peer group, or their “family.” When asked how they view participation in band within the context of their high school experience, student responses such as “it’s fun,” “calming,” “a great experience,” and “it makes school better” were prominent. For example, S.S. explained that “band really is a big part of who I am and my life as a student. It helps me grow to be a better person.” B.A. has also grown “so close with the people in my band, and they’ve turned into my best friends.” Senior students like E.V. “have met so many good friends through being in band, and I have a class with people that I otherwise wouldn’t have had one with.” C.W. asserts that band is an “escape with people who are also music lovers.” L.B. struggled with confidence due to the COVID-19 pandemic and found that “band is helping build it back.” In a time of significant uncertainty, M.K. noticed band brings them a sense of “peace and comfort” and helps to “calm everything down.” Three students remarked that their band teachers were a highlight, with one student enjoying their teacher’s “weird sense of humour.” Students consistently emphasized their band community as being important to them; time together making music is invaluable.

### **Skill Development**

Students also wrote about appreciation for “playing well,” “improving skills as a musician,” “the feeling of accomplishment,” and “possessing a lifelong skill.” C.V. finds meaning in “the fact that I get to improve my skill at playing an instrument and go home and practice harder pieces becomes meaningful when I can spend time on a piece and then, in class,

have the opportunity to play it to the best of my ability.” Improvement in musical skills was most recognizable and most often mentioned by senior students.

### **Highlights of Pre-Pandemic Band**

Overwhelmingly, the responses from the student questionnaire spoke positively to the importance of performance. The survey clarified if there was any doubt about whether students enjoyed performing. Students were asked to mention the highlight of their high school band experience, and above all, students responded with their highlight being the performances and trips. E.V. exclaimed:

Definitely performing! Sharing the things that we as a team have worked so hard on and getting to bring joy through music to people at the same time is so amazing. As well, I’ve been able to spend time with my best friend and make music with him, which was such a brilliant experience.

H.H. chose to describe a jazz performance memory when a band member “snuck the McDonald’s theme into one of his solos.” Additionally, students discussed friendships made in band while learning music for said performances and trips. L.S. summarizes their highlights as “improving as a musician, being with friends and performances.” Performances are integral to the band experience and leave lasting memories with students.

### **Loss**

It is impossible to learn the aspects of band that students enjoy and appreciate without empathizing with the massive loss felt by the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Students who were not permitted to play for the first year repeatedly emphasized a loss of enthusiasm. S.S. described the regulations as “changing the experience drastically” and lamented the loss of “out-of-school experiences and no clinicians.” H.P. explained that:

The COVID-19 pandemic affected my participation in all my classes, and I did not wholeheartedly participate in the band. We did not necessarily have a COVID-19 pandemic-band experience, as our practices were online and very sparse. The lack of face-to-face contact made the experience unenjoyable and lacking.

B.A. explained, “we couldn’t play, so we did theory, listening assignments, music history and drumming until we were finally allowed to play masked with bell covers outside with 20-25 other people all standing six feet apart.” Not being able to play instruments and perform concerts was stated numerous times as negatively impacting their COVID-19 pandemic-band experience.

Students were further asked to state what they missed about pre-pandemic band class. Three familiar themes emerged: the difficulty of connecting with their band community; live performances; and travel opportunities. P.R. said they missed “the trips even though that’s not the best part of band.” “Further clarified by C.W., “even though that’s not the focus of band, it really brings the group together,” and “cements the relationship for the next year.” S.T. “Definitely missed band trips, but also not having drumline and jazz band,” and felt “there was less music to indulge in.” S.G. stated it was “probably trips and concerts” that they missed most, “but now that things are a little back to normal, I like the band more than I did.” Most surveyed students emphatically expressed how challenging the COVID-19 pandemic-band experience was.

### **Impacts of Restrictions**

In contrast to those students who were not permitted to play in person, many students surveyed were allowed to play. They described flute shields, bell masks, puppy pads, outdoor playing with circus tents, and plexiglass shields as standard practice. A frequently mentioned frustration-inducing restriction was “social distancing” and having the band “split into two groups which was not ideal.” A.S. described the experience:

It wasn’t fun during the COVID-19 pandemic. We were divided by plastic screens, and the band was split into two groups. It felt more like a math class than a band class, where we weren’t united. And we didn’t get our band trip which is too bad.

Another student remarked, “It made it significantly less fun. For a while, I never really wanted to come to band. Our band was literally quartered, and it was super depressing.” S.D. noted, “it changed the experience by changing how we had to communicate” and described how they “started to fall out of love with band.” Most students adapted to the changes but indicated that it significantly affected their enjoyment.

### **Performances**

Student responses indicated that live-streamed performances, video concerts, and outdoor concerts helped motivate students to continue. S.T. reminisced:

We held a few intimate outdoor concerts. We’d pick a time during school hours as extracurriculars and set up all equipment on the school lawn. Family, friends, and students would come to watch and sit in lawn chairs or on picnic blankets. I enjoy the memory.

Additionally, L.S. stated, “we had to space out, but my band directors did a good job of creating a strong program nonetheless by dividing the band into two groups and having sections of the class for theory and musical passion projects.” Despite the dramatic changes, it is evident through student responses that most preferred to perform in whatever capacity they were allowed as it motivated them to keep playing.

### **Student Struggles**

Student responses regarding their COVID-19 pandemic-band experience consistently demonstrated high amounts of struggles. The survey asked students what they never want to experience again, and the foremost comments were “online band, it sucked!”, “playing with masks,” “not being able to play together,” and “being so isolated.” Additionally, students were asked if there was anything they wanted to keep or any adaptations they wanted to continue, and their responses varied. A few students surveyed expressed appreciation for new experiences like rigorous sanitary precautions, usage of additional online resources, new options for live-streamed concerts, and smaller class sizes, allowing for more teacher attention. Notably, most students said they would keep nothing. Others stated they “didn’t like any of it,” that it was “really difficult,” and that it completely changed how they “worked as a band.”

Despite the struggles students endured, a grade-twelve student appreciated being able to play and stated, “it honestly changed my experience in a good way because we felt like a band that could stick together regardless. I felt strong. Band also felt fun when we played fun songs.” Particularly noteworthy is S.T.’s comment, “although troublesome and a bit unorthodox, there is absolutely no chance I would have ever dropped band, and I’m grateful for the experiences I had.” Survey responses demonstrate that students were not prepared for the struggles of the COVID-19 pandemic-band, yet the struggles did not prevent them from continuing to choose band.

### **Highlights of Post-Pandemic Band**

#### ***Student Views***

The COVID-19 pandemic required students to make incredible social sacrifices in addition to losing aspects of their lives that they loved. Familiar themes emerged when students were asked to explain what the best part of high school band was once restrictions were lifted. Responses included “the community,” “being able to play together,” and “getting together and hearing everyone come together and play” as the best parts of band being ‘back to normal.’

Additionally, L.V. stated, “all of it, especially being in a big band again,” and S.G. feels “older and wiser,” and notices how much more they “love connecting with bandmates and getting those chills when the music sounds good.” Many students commented how joyful performing is again and are excited to go on the first trip of their high school band career.

### ***Parent Views***

Students were asked what they think their parents would say the benefits of participating in band class are, and answers varied from “lucky to learn musical skills,” “brain development,” “dedication, determination, and musical ability,” and themes around student mental health. One student believed their parents felt that “this band has made me get out of my comfort zone.” Other students think their parents see that “playing an instrument is a beneficial way to improve mental health” or that “picking up my instruments lets me play out my emotions and words,” and C.S. explained, “my mental health would have been worse if I did not take band. I feel really connected to band, even during the pandemic.” Most students felt their parents recognized the multiple interpersonal and intellectual benefits of taking band.

### ***Lifelong Takeaways***

Students were further surveyed on what aspects of band that they would retain after graduation. Answers were mixed between musical skills and life skills. Responses such as “musical skills,” “music theory, and improved breathing,” “appreciating music,” “listening,” and a good sense of rhythm and time were prominent throughout. In particular, H.P. felt “band skills will help me multitask well and help me work with others” in the future, and that band “has taught me how to read sheet music, which is a very useful skill.” S.R. is grateful for the lifelong skill of playing different instruments and maintaining self-discipline, which comes from practicing and sticking with an instrument.” Most students see their musical skills as a benefit; however, many were unsure if they would continue playing after high school.

Conversely, life skills students stated such as “leadership,” “work ethic,” “time management,” “focus,” “working with others,” “teamwork skills,” “dedication,” “social skills,” and “patience and leadership” are all skills that they emphatically believe to be beneficial. M.B. explains the benefit of learning to be a problem solver in band because one can “come up with solutions on the spot and be calm with it.” E.V. posits that “the ability to work with others, leadership, hard work, the ability to practice, and communication are all skills that have grown tremendously by participating in band, and they will be useful for my whole life.” C.B. tributes

band class with teaching the skill of “being a good person and friend.” Most students listed several musical and life skills they will take away from the band experience after graduation.

### **Advice to Young Band Students**

Perhaps the most enlightening survey question evolved around advice students would give young people considering joining band. Except for one student who simply stated, “don’t” with no explanation, 108 of the 109 students said “do it” in numerous ways. Some briefer responses included: “I would definitely encourage it; band is one of the best activities I’ve committed to,” “You learn new skills and make new friends that you wouldn’t expect,” “it’s a valuable experience that can not only help you as a person but academically,” and “It’s the best thing that will happen to you,” Responses were repeatedly encouraging to future students.

Several students gave more detailed advice, touching on several aspects of band. H.P. advises students to try it and to:

Stay in band for at least three months before you decide to quit. The schedule and workload might take some time to adjust towards, and you can meet plenty of people in that time. It is a worthwhile experience that is a staple of my high-school life, and I would not be too hasty to quit right away, as I also felt like that in grade 9.

By reflecting on feelings from grade nine, H.P. demonstrated appreciation for persevering through challenging times. S.H. also remembered a detailed description of their younger inner dialogue:

Here's what I told myself in grade 9: Do you have enough time? Are you really devoted to doing this? Are you patient with yourself? Are you ready? Are you going to join something like AP or IB? Another thing I would stress to young students is that band is not some silly little class; you must pull your work into it.

Both H.P. and S.H. describe times when they considered quitting and are thankful for their decisions to continue.

The survey question that allowed students to advise young people considering band created opportunities for them to reflect on their experiences. E.V. exclaimed:

You may feel nervous about not being good enough or anxious about all the people (I know I definitely was) but trust me, there are some incredible people in the band. It’s a great bonding experience too. You also learn so many skills, and it’s also really good to have on applications for universities and special programs because of all these skills. It’s

just a great community to be part of, and when you meet other band students from different schools, you automatically have this special connection, especially when you play the same instrument. Literally, just do it. It's not a hard class to be a part of, and it has so many benefits. Take the opportunity, trust me.

Additionally, C.W. said:

Do it. You will regret not doing it in the future. You'll thank yourself when you can play an instrument, when you have so many friends and when your brain function is higher because you're studying music.

Further, F.E. said:

Do it. It might be hard, but it's worth it. You will meet awesome people and make memories that will follow you forever. The music gives a sense of freedom and simplicity while belonging to something bigger than yourself. Also, the band trips are AMAZING!!

Despite their disrupted COVID-19 pandemic-band experience, all three students emphasized the benefits of music, community, and appreciation for the experience.

Additionally, students shared their own experiences through their advice. Responses ranged from continuing to practice as improvement comes with time to emphasizing the payoff from the hard work, opportunities, and memories gained. F.B. "would tell them that it may not be the best at first, but if you keep working and putting what you want to hear into it, it will come, and it will be beautiful." D.L. stated, "it'll be difficult at first, you're not going to sound good, but when you do sound good, it's all worth it." S.G. further encouraged students to "do it! You might love it, and it's a great way to learn. Band teachers are also always great." N.W. suggests, "join because it's a very rewarding experience. Everyone is so nice, and we are like a family. You will miss out big time if you don't". The advice to young students gives a great deal of insight into students' views on their experiences, and the majority are very grateful for the opportunity.

### **Summary**

The student survey questions provided several opportunities for the researcher to gain significant insight into why students continued in band in the post-pandemic climate. All students answered several questions, including those asking them to describe their pre-pandemic band experience highlights, what they missed most during the COVID-19 pandemic, and what

they found most meaningful in band. The same three themes emerged from student responses: (1) community, (2) performing, and (3) travel. Students struggled with online band, not playing together, being in a small band, and not performing. However, they reflected on their overall band experiences and described the multitude of musical and life skills as benefits to take away from their band experiences; many students felt their parents would say the same.

The numerous detailed responses that respondents provided when asked to advise young students considering band allowed the most insight into why students participate in band. Not only did the vast majority of senior musicians advise young students to take band, but they also described, in detail, the benefits they experienced in band. According to current band members, meaningful relationships, valuable life skills, and unique musical talent are some of what young students considering band would encounter in their journey.



## Chapter Six

### Band Parent/Guardian Survey Data Perspective

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapters illustrated that band teachers and students had been affected by COVID-19 pandemic regulations and program delivery; students and teachers experienced band through a completely different lens. This chapter explores the perspectives of parents/guardians. Parents/guardians of band students observed the programming changes, and the survey allowed families to describe their observations.

#### **Context**

Thirty-five parents/guardians of band students from each of the five participating high schools completed the survey. Fourteen of the surveyed adults participated in their high school band program, while twenty did not. Each participant had at least one child taking band, and two had four children in band. In addition to band students, band parents/guardians were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, as the responses provided in this chapter will indicate, and participants indicated several negative impacts throughout the survey.

#### **Value of Music Education**

The survey asked parents/guardians to explain whether it was important that their child participates in the band program. One parent stated, “No. I’d like him to do programs he enjoys and excels at,” while the other 34 parents/guardians listed numerous reasons why they consider it essential for their child to participate in band.

#### ***Social Aspect***

Several parents listed the “social aspect” of being in band, which is an “inclusive community,” as beneficial to their child. L.P. feels “music is important in development and overall life enjoyment,” and L.B. lists aspects of band such as the “creative outlet, supportive group, non-competitive team, group goals, the pursuit of a greater good than oneself” as beneficial to their child. S.B. has a child in grade 12 and stated:

At first, it was important to us because she valued it. The more we learned about the benefits of band for her education and the positive student interactions in the program, the more we began to value it as parents.

Most of the surveyed parents/guardians recognized that a band program offers a significant opportunity for “teamwork and belonging” and for students to thrive in a group of musicians who are “well-rounded people.”

### ***Creativity and Brain Development***

Sprinkled throughout survey responses were statements such as “music is so good for the brain,” “I believe music supports brain development,” and “it is vital in forming left-brain connections.” Similarly, respondents said that students “can express their creativity” in band and that band “cultivates creativity and enlarges the brain.” A.R. asserted, “Music helps build the creative side of a person's thinking, which also augments their overall perspective on all subjects.” Music challenges a young student to think in different ways than academics or sports, and several of the surveyed parents/guardians see this as a valuable aspect of band.

### ***Discipline***

Lastly, the theme of personal discipline emerged from parents discussing the dedication involved in musical skill development. S.S. said having their child participate in band is essential “because music is like a second language,” and there are “many benefits beyond structure, discipline and teamwork.” More specifically, B.D. said, “It's not a make-or-break proposition, but both kids are musically inclined, and the hard work and discipline required will help them in their lives going forward.” Students who continue with band through their high school careers demonstrate discipline in numerous ways, including the discipline to practice, the discipline to attend early morning rehearsals, and the discipline of being accountable to other band members. Those who watch students play in band over several years undoubtedly recognize the discipline required to be successful.

### **Parent/Guardian Observations of COVID-19 Pandemic Impact**

The survey asked parents/guardians how the COVID-19 pandemic changed their child's band experience. Most responses emphasized the negative impact with themes of loss of group playing, loss of performances, and difficulty with mental health. One parent noted that “music is good for the soul” and their child missed it. The hard work of the band directors and school divisions to create a meaningful experience despite the restrictions was also noted. One parent reported that “school divisions did almost everything they could” to keep the band program “alive,” but the experience was still “negatively affected.” Playing skills were “generally maintained but not advanced as much as they could have been.” Another parent felt that “the

pandemic was hard on everyone, but the band program adapted the best they could.” Despite the negative impacts, most parents expressed gratitude that their children could still participate in a music program.

### ***Loss***

Similar to findings from student surveys, themes of loss emerged from parent/guardian responses of students who were not permitted to play in person or with a full band. One parent noted their child still “enjoyed band” but “missed the social aspect of practicing together and performing.” Another parent remarked that their child “played a lot of music at home but missed the playing together component.” Several responses emphasized the loss of performance as a problem because it “slowed down their growth and interest since they weren’t able to be with a full group.” B.B. said their child “participated in school bands in whatever format they were offered. It was essential that the social connection of band be maintained even if they couldn’t physically play together. But playing in a group was really missed.” Responses continuously emphasized the negative impact of the loss of performances and group playing to “perform what they were learning,” causing the decline of “motivation to practice” and even causing some students to become “depressed.”

Performances and concerts are often community celebrations with friends, family, teachers, and bandmates in attendance. R.C. explained that they felt:

So happy when we could see a Zoom concert. The Christmas concert is one of our larger family events and one that is cherished. We were thankful the district was supportive of a continued band program. My child’s involvement in band is really important to them. Additionally, S.S., a parent of several band students, remarked that their “youngest started band during the pandemic and barely made it through” because of the restrictions. S.S felt that the “physical distance between the kids took away some of the camaraderie” that their other children had experienced in their non-pandemic band years. Survey responses indicated consistently that performances are important to families.

### ***Band Teacher Efforts***

The “heroic adjustments” made by band teachers to “keep kids playing” was noted in survey responses. One parent admired the creative use of outdoor circus tents and plexiglass dividers. Another parent remarked how impressed they were with the teacher who “put in a lot of effort to make sure students were supported and engaged” in music. W.R. stated, “We were

fortunate to have an amazing teacher who did everything he could for the kids to play.” When reflecting on the effort of band teachers to continue band, B.D. stated, “It made for some interesting times (individual tents while playing, Zoom meetings, distancing); however, the two of them continued on, and they have renewed interest and connection.” Only three of the thirty-five surveyed believed the COVID-19 pandemic-band experience did not negatively impact their children. Two of those students were in a virtual honour band encouraged by their teacher, and their parents “appreciated the effort made by the instructor.” In each high school, band directors explored whatever means necessary to keep students engaged, and survey responses indicated that parents appreciated their efforts.

Younger band students demonstrated less enthusiasm for band than those with more experience. S.S. noted that:

It was still positive because the older two were more established. Our division's band teachers kept it fun and were creative within the limitations. That said, it was a negative experience for the youngest to the point they dreaded it and begged to quit. This was a huge decision as the older children are very involved and love every aspect of band.

It should be noted that this discrepancy in enthusiasm may have existed because the younger student's entire band experience coincided with restrictions that did not allow for performances or community building. One parent stated that “digital band class can never replace authentic in-person music transfer.”

### **Direct Impact on Parents/Guardians**

Following the opportunities to describe the value of band and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on their child’s band experience, those surveyed were asked if a specific change directly impacted them as a parent/guardian. In general, parents expressed that they were not directly affected in any way other than missing performances. Responses such as “I missed concerts so much,” “not being able to see the kids perform in person was a loss for me,” and saying they could not “celebrate through performance” demonstrated this loss. B.H. stated:

We missed seeing the band as a whole and attending concerts; we lost connection with other band parents and the band director. It was harder to understand what they were learning overall, but we did appreciate the work done to keep it going as much as possible.

L.B.’s family felt impacted and lamented, “we missed my older daughter’s final band concert.

We had been looking forward to it for so long. I felt very sad that it was taken from us.”

It is exciting for an audience to see students’ progress and hear them sound great together when presenting their music; many families that responded expressed that loss.

Finally, the parents/guardians surveyed were asked if any changes were made to the band program during the COVID-19 pandemic that they would like to keep, and the vast majority simply stated, “no.” Alternatively, B.B, T.S., F.G. and L.B. would like to see the continuation of the online lesson and the use of recording software options. C.D., B.F. and L.L. would like the continuation of outdoor performances and classes when weather permits. Two parents would like to keep the hygiene practices; one remarked that smaller class sizes are beneficial. Without a doubt, parents/guardians “appreciated the efforts made by the instructors,” and as B.D. stated, “the most important things they already kept were the instructors. The school band staff are amazing, and their resilience through that difficult time is what brought the students back. Amazing teachers are paramount, and we are fortunate to have them.” Every experience that parents/guardians desired to keep within their child’s band program was made possible by band teachers willing to step out of their comfort zone and find whatever means necessary to offer music education/band.

### **Summary**

The parent/guardian observations of the COVID-19 pandemic impact on band programs are relevant in understanding post-pandemic retention. One might argue that students need help to accurately articulate their reasons for specific actions, and parent/guardian perspectives fill the gaps. Throughout survey responses, parents/guardians mentioned elements such as the social aspect, positive impact on mental health, creative outlet, and brain development as valuable. Furthermore, parents/guardians believe it is essential for their children to learn the discipline required to be part of the “band team.” Parents/guardians were continuously grateful for every musical avenue offered throughout the COVID-19 pandemic but lamented the loss of group playing, live performances and band trips. Moreover, survey responders appreciated the band teacher's efforts. Responders recognized that band teachers went far beyond their usual duties and persevered through dramatic programming changes.

## Chapter Seven

### Summary and Conclusions

#### Review of the Research Statement

This research aimed to study the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on band programs. Recognizing the band programs discussed in chapter four as “traditional” during the COVID-19 pandemic would have been challenging. During the pandemic years, 2020-2022, restrictions changed and evolved to reflect each phase of the COVID-19 pandemic climate. The most impactful changes were schedule adjustments that resulted in less teacher-student contact time, significantly shrinking bands; the complete cessation of in-person playing; no live performances; physical and social distancing; and strict sanitary guidelines. These restrictions dramatically altered the lens through which many students experienced band. Understanding the immediate post-pandemic enrolment within high school band programs that have been directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic can be valuable information for music educators in the future.

#### Research Questions

This study began with the intent to learn about the following central research questions:

- Did the COVID-19 pandemic have an impact on band programs?
- What was the response of the teachers and students to the alterations of the band program as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What was the outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic for band students and band programs with respect to retention and attrition?

In order to answer these questions, I asked the following sub-questions:

- What were some of the government-enforced restrictions on band programs?
- How were band programs affected by the changes?
- What pedagogical changes were implemented by band directors to continue program delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Did band student, band teacher and band parent/guardian perspectives on band participation change because of the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, in what ways?
- What influences band students to continue pursuing band in post-pandemic programs?
- What can music educators learn from this COVID-19 pandemic experience?

Data results were obtained through interviews with band teachers and anonymous band student and band parent/guardian surveys. I designed questions to capture perspectives on experiences in pre-pandemic, mid-pandemic, and post-pandemic band programs from those directly involved: band students, band teachers and band parents/guardians. Questions for each cohort focused on experiences with COVID-19 pandemic-band program restrictions, pedagogical practices, uses of technology, performances (or lack thereof), perspectives on band programs, and which adaptations should be retained or discarded. I will address each sub-question by drawing on the data from the three different cohorts, and then I will present answers to the central questions based on the information generated from the sub-questions.

### ***Research Sub-Question One***

*What changes were made to band programs in response to restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The COVID-19 pandemic affected all aspects of education, particularly band programs. Governments made decisions regarding restrictions, and individual school divisions responded with guidelines specific to their schools. The school divisions' decisions about their band programs were based on the ability to follow the safety guidelines and significantly affected each high school in this study.

Each school division enforced the government-directed physical COVID-19 pandemic restrictions with specific directives to the five high schools in this study. In the 2020-2021 school year, hybrid scheduling based on student surname and a quint-semester system (classes only lasting six weeks) considerably reduced class sizes and frequency of contact time. Mr. Gray's band classes were the only classes to run all year as they took place before school. Every high school had rigorous sanitary protocols which extended into band rooms. With appropriate physical spacing (beginning at four meters and eventually going to two meters), the students attending the schools in this study that were allowed to play in person had to use bell masks, flute shields, puppy pads, plexiglass dividers, and circus tents. Some even marked student names on the floor with stickers to show appropriate spacing. School caretakers placed hand sanitizer everywhere, and percussionists were required to sanitize between each use of mallets or equipment. Conversely, two high schools in this study were not permitted in-person playing for the entire year, regardless of the possible ability to follow safety guidelines. In-person performances were not allowed, and no guests were permitted in schools. This restriction also

meant there was little opportunity for collaboration with neighbouring elementary schools. Administrators in all five high schools demonstrated support and motivation to keep band operating in any capacity possible.

Restrictions lessened in the 2021-2022 school year. However, band continued to operate through a different lens. All five high schools could play during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those with band classes before school ran all year, and those with band in the timetable used a quad-semester<sup>18</sup> system. Unlike the pre-COVID-19 format for band class (an hour every other day year-round), the quad-semester system had band students attend for two hours every other day for half of the year. Spacing between students, though less, was still required. Additionally, the band teachers in this study continued to use bell masks, puppy pads, and flute shields. Performances were gradually implemented through live streams, shared videos and outdoor concerts. Finally, in May 2022, each band teacher was able to organize a concert similar to those in pre-covid times. Undoubtedly, band programs at the end of the 2021-2022 year looked vastly different than the previous year, with more positive changes to look forward to in the 2022-2023 school year.

In each of the five high schools in this study, there were similarities and differences in how the government and school division decisions regarding restrictions affected band programming. Moreover, all five band directors were flexible and adaptable to each restriction, creating unique band programs to engage students.

### ***Research Sub-Question Two***

*How were band programs affected by the changes?*

Government-imposed regulations drastically changed how band programs operated, affecting band teachers, band students and parents/guardians of these students. Each of the five band teachers in this study were incredibly flexible and responded to extreme adversity with passion and deep care for their students. As such, each program maintained healthy enrolment despite the multitude of restrictions.

**Band Teacher Experiences.** In addition to a decline and skill level caused by less playing time, Ms. Green, Mr. Black, and Mr. Gray felt the physical separation between students directly affected their playing confidence. Additionally, all five band teachers felt masks and

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<sup>18</sup> Quad semesters separated the year into quarters; each class lasted eight weeks.



physical separation, which included few opportunities to hang out in the band room, contributed to the decline of the community atmosphere. There is no denying that technology was beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic times, yet all five teachers currently use very little in their classes since observing that their students did not enjoy most of it and preferred to play together in person. Each band teacher spoke of student disappointment with no extracurricular band activities or live performances. Even so, none of the interviewed band teachers believed the loss of band trips affected student choice of whether to pursue band. In fact, most band students registered in the 2022-2023 school year had yet to experience a band trip, and there were no concrete plans to travel at course selection time.

Band teachers were constantly responding to changing rules and restrictions; however, throughout both years of changing regulations, each teacher said they were happy to still teach music through whatever means necessary. A noteworthy change experienced by each teacher was the reduction of performance pressure and the reassessment of their workload. Ms. White was the newest in the profession and had not yet experienced the magnitude of what the four more experienced teachers were used to concerning personal pace. Ms. Green, Mr. Gray, and Mr. Black felt more relaxed, especially the latter, who noticed that the lack of performance changed his interactions with his students. Mr. Black also reveled in his extra time for personal and professional development. Mr. Gray reflected on the volume of extracurricular opportunities he had previously provided and questioned how many he would return. As happy as each band teacher was to have their programs ‘back to normal,’ each was reevaluating how much time devoted to extracurricular activities should resume, including big trips. At the time of the interviews, all five teachers planned to travel with their bands during the spring of 2023, and each had a new outlook on the necessity of touring.

**Student Experiences.** Throughout the student surveys, the themes of loss and appreciation were prominent. Band students experienced significant disruption to their daily lives and an intense loss within their band class. Students continually shared that they disliked the restrictions and missed being together and performing with their music community. While they did not enjoy several aspects of pandemic-band, they were unwilling to give it up and appreciated the opportunities that their band teachers provided them. Several students commented on the struggles of being unable to play together and how isolated they felt, emphasizing the beneficial impact of bands’ social aspect. In contrast to the band teacher

observations, many of the surveyed students lamented not having an opportunity to go on a band trip. Still, they continued to pursue band. In most cases, the student responses indicate greater appreciation for the current musical opportunities available to them.

**Parent/Guardian Experiences.** Several parents/guardians surveyed echoed the students' sentiments concerning the loss of the social aspect of band and performances. However, most still encouraged the students to continue with band for its many benefits, including the creative outlet, discipline, and brain development. Several parents/guardians noticed a decline in their child's enthusiasm and motivation for music during the 2020-2021 school year, which caused some to worry about the mental health of the young musicians. Though not "back to normal," the overall morale improved in the 2021-2022 school year, and some parents/guardians specifically emphasized their gratitude to band teachers for doing whatever they could to keep students engaged. Most parents/guardians stated the direct impacts on families to be minimal. However, "not being able to see the kids perform" was a recurring theme, specifically with senior band families who missed having a final band concert. Consequently, parents have been eagerly attending live performances since restrictions have been lifted, largely because they did not have the opportunity during the COVID-19 pandemic years.

Band programs were dramatically affected by government-enforced changes; however, the results from this study indicate that band teachers, band students and band parents/guardians still preferred to participate in band rather than not having the option at all.

### ***Research Sub-Question Three***

*What pedagogical changes were implemented by band directors to continue program delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The responses from the interviews conducted in this study reveal that band teachers faced numerous scheduling changes, physical restrictions, and less contact time with students. Each of the five band teachers in this study needed to creatively and resourcefully adapt their pedagogy to work under constantly evolving restrictions. With the best interest of their students at heart, they successfully dealt with dynamic restrictions to meaningfully deliver music education.

**Technology.** All five band teachers demonstrated particular ingenuity by using technology for purposes such as: engaging families with live-streamed performances; creating virtual video collaborations; aiding in playing assessments; teaching music theory concepts; recording practice sessions; and "Zooming in" with other professional musicians. SmartMusic

became a large part of the curriculum for those unable to play in person with their students. Each teacher dabbled in new or different music software. One teacher even taught over 20 optional individual Zoom lessons weekly to compensate for the reduced in-person time; this was over and above his daily scheduled hours. Each band teacher made significant use of technology during the height of restrictions, yet all five report that they currently use very little since “nothing can beat playing together in person.”

**Repertoire.** The impact of less in-person contact time with students was significant. Repertoire selections needed to be less difficult in all five programs, and small ensemble music became prominent in three programs. Ms. Green used *Flex*-band music, while others continued with full-band scores with reduced instrumentation. An added challenge for Mr. Gray, Mr. Black and Ms. Green in the fall of 2020 was the requirement to stop playing after 30 minutes to let aerosols dissipate. Playing expectations needed to be altered, and Mr. Gray stated that it would take years, possibly to the end of his career, for his band's skill level to reach pre-pandemic levels.

**Assessment.** In most cases, assessment practices became less rigorous, with Mr. Gray, Ms. Green and Mr. Black finding that they were more lenient in their grading. Each teacher created new ways to assess, which included creating unique assignments such as passion projects or prescribed and recorded practice sessions. For those teachers who saw students in quint and quad semesters, there was no way to meet every instrumental technical outcome. The pace of the classes was slower than in pre-covid times, allowing the teachers to experience less performance pressure to which they were accustomed.

**Physical Space.** Another challenge in COVID-19 pandemic playing was that students were spread out around music areas, outdoors and in different locations within the facility where space allowed. In the fall of 2020, before the hybrid scheduling began, Mr. Gray, Mr. Black, and Ms. Green could only allow half of the class to play at the same time, so they were essentially tasked with creating activities for two classes operating simultaneously. Mr. Brown and Ms. White were not permitted to play with their students; they were tasked with creating a new course consisting of theory and music appreciation activities in school and playing assignments to be completed at home. In the fall of 2021, students were allowed to play in larger groups again but were still required to be four meters apart. Every instrumental section was forced to spread

apart at fair distances, so hearing each other was challenging. The physical space required each band teacher to adjust their expectations for their desired sound quality.

Between September 2020 and the interviews in October 2022, band teachers were consistently implementing changes to their pedagogical practices. All five band teachers indicated that they learned a great deal about themselves and their abilities to adapt what they had always done to look completely different to keep students engaged in band.

#### ***Research sub-question four***

*Did perspectives on band participation change because of the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, in what ways?*

The information gathered from the three cohorts of participants in this study informed what high school band programs looked like before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were lifted. Throughout student, teacher, and parent/guardian responses, there was an evident shift in perspectives on band participation.

**Band Teacher Perspective.** All five band teachers noted students' gratitude for being back with their friends in the band community, which many referred to as “home.” They also observed a renewed excitement for performing, having larger concert audiences than in pre-pandemic times. Mr. Black remarked that many of his students showed daily gratitude, saying “thank you” at the end of every class. All five band teachers observed a newfound appreciation for performance and travel opportunities compared to pre-pandemic times. Additionally, band teacher perspectives on student assessment shifted to a more relaxed approach. Ms. Green, Mr. Black, and Mr. Gray all reported being more lenient in several aspects of assessment, such as technical skills and punctuality of submissions.

Band teachers recognized the fragile mental health of students due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and wished to contribute positively to their students' lives rather than to their struggles. As previously documented, Yoo (2021) posits that music teachers can support fundamental psychological needs in addition to providing high levels of structure, encouraging motivation, creating positive educational outcomes, and music persistence. The responses from the five band directors in this study indicate that they each immediately adapted to their students' needs and adjusted to their pre-pandemic performance expectations. Despite extreme adversity, the five band teachers in this study remained exceedingly warm and cared for their students.

**Student Perspective.** Several surveyed students consistently described the joy and happiness of being back with their bandmates, performing music together and anticipating an upcoming band trip. Mr. Black felt that his pre-pandemic band students had started to take traveling to perform in music festivals for granted. Conversely, he felt his 2022-2023 band students would be happy to go anywhere as a band community. These sentiments echo Adderly, Kennedy and Berz's (2003) findings that performing together is a meaningful experience for the students and a motivator to continue playing. Furthermore, band enrolment numbers in all five high schools are robust, reinforcing Baker's (2009) and Neill's (1998) theories that student pleasure is associated with participating in high school music ensembles and can be a primary motivational predictor for retention. Although the COVID-19 pandemic-band experience was less enjoyable due to drastic programming changes, students were unwilling to give up the experience. They were happy and grateful to be 'back to normal'; compared to pre-pandemic times, they more frequently verbalized this gratitude.

**Parent/Guardian Perspective.** As previously documented in Koop's (2018) study, parents list agency, pride, self-actualization, and self-growth as benefits they see for their children of playing in an ensemble. Parents also frequently listed the importance of cognitive, social, and kinesthetic skills and the emotional release that young musicians experience through playing music. Several parents/guardians in this study viewed music as a stress release for their children during the COVID-19 pandemic and described it as an activity for which they were grateful. Additionally, the respondents in this study repeatedly mentioned their gratitude towards their child's band teacher for keeping everyone engaged. Since engagement with parents/guardians could not happen in terms of concerts during the COVID-19 pandemic, several parents/guardians stated that they missed the concert performances. Band teachers reported that once concert restrictions were lifted, audiences were larger than pre-pandemic audiences. This increase indicates a shift in parent/guardian willingness to attend performances and lend their support even more to band programs. As McPherson's 2009 research highlights, a child's desire to play music is affected by parent-child interaction, and parents who support their child's music-making will strongly affect overall retention. The survey results seemed to indicate that they communicated their support more evidently by encouraging their children to continue through the pandemic-band experience. This information is particularly relevant because this understanding of retention in band programs is an important research question guiding this study.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, each high school in this study had healthy enrolment and a vibrant music program. The loss of so many elements of band appeared to create a newfound appreciation for experiences within the band program and for the work of band directors to keep students engaged. In the post-pandemic climate, band students and band parents/guardians outwardly express gratitude for the opportunities to resume band.

### ***Research Sub-Question Five***

*What influences band students to continue pursuing band in post-pandemic programs?*

Each high school in this study maintained healthy band student enrolment through the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the post-pandemic climate in each music program continued to be vibrant and robust. To understand the reasons that students continued to choose band, those surveyed were asked several questions regarding their pre-pandemic, mid-pandemic, and post-pandemic band experience.

Early in the survey, students were asked why they chose band in the 2022-2023 school year. Responses were mainly statements including: ‘I like music;’ ‘playing instruments;’ ‘I am happy to be with friends;’ and ‘I am excited to perform and travel.’ Later in the survey, students were asked to discuss the highlights of the post-pandemic band. Similar to the initial responses, themes of community and friendship continued to dominate. As previously documented, Rode (2022) noted that community is a prevalent pillar of intrinsic motivation. Moreover, extrinsic motivators like band trips did not exist during the height of restrictions. As such, the results from this study highlighted the value of intrinsic factors. The students in the band programs continued to be a community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, albeit through a very different lens. Unique experiences such as virtually recorded performances and outside band rehearsals under a circus tent created new memories and a special bond between students. Furthermore, Ms. Green felt the bond between her students grew through the challenging experience and felt they “survived” the drastic changes together. One student said, "even though it was a bit unorthodox, I would not change a thing.”

Perhaps the most impactful evidence for post-pandemic band enrolment came when students were asked what they would take away from band after graduation and, further, what advice they would give to students considering band. Student survey responses indicated appreciation for skills gained through band that included: musical skills, leadership, discipline, work ethic, teamwork, dedication, and patience through band. 108 of 109 student responses

emphatically encouraged young students to choose band and described the work involved in learning an instrument and the reward for persisting. Students frequently discussed friendship, belonging, and the joy of performing and traveling as prominent motivational factors. It is worth mentioning from the findings that while few students surveyed spoke of their parents/guardians' influence on their decision to choose band, this does not mean that parent/guardian perspectives are not important. They just did not surface as critical conversations from students.

A breadth of music education research reveals the significance of the role of the teacher on band program student enjoyment and rates of retention (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2013; Dill Bruenger, 2009; Evans & Liu, 2019). Congruent with previous research, several students in this study mentioned their appreciation for their band teachers' efforts and their relationships with their band teachers as a motivator to continue. Jagow (2007) advocates that warm and caring teachers who create supportive interpersonal involvement will influence students' desire to stay in music. All five band teachers in this study demonstrated care and efforts to continue their interpersonal involvement throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, students in this study mentioned their relationship with their band teacher as a valuable reason to choose band, and moreover, three students spoke of their plans to pursue music as a career. B.F. remarked that they wished to "become a band teacher," and C.W. stated, "I want to be a band teacher, so doing band is in direct support of my goal." These comments emphasize band teachers' meaningful role in their student's lives.

In addition to simply liking band, through several survey questions, band students had several opportunities to list the many contributing factors in their decision to continue in band in the post-pandemic climate. Band students recognized important life skills, the importance of the relationships with their band community, including their band teacher, and their love of performing.

### ***Research Sub-Question Six***

*What can music educators learn from this experience?*

The findings in this study were critical in identifying how band programs fared through the COVID-19 global COVID-19 pandemic and what thriving band programs look like in the post-pandemic climate. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, and the restrictions were initially imposed by the government and then further by each school division, the band teachers in this study feared that they might be unable to keep healthy enrolment in their current and future

programs. Despite the extreme adversity they faced, their enrolment indeed remained strong. Each band teacher interviewed spoke of their many adaptations from 2020 to 2022 and the consistently positive engagement of band students and their families. They also felt supported by their administration and their student's parents/guardians, which contributed to their motivation to do whatever was necessary to create a meaningful music education.

**Passionate and Creative Band Teachers Are Essential to Thrive.** The results of this study showed that band programs and music communities could be sustained even during extreme adversity, such as a global pandemic. In a pandemic, flexible and adaptable band teachers can maintain healthy programs by creating meaningful ways for students and families to stay engaged. These findings are consistent with the existing body of research asserting that when students perceive a teacher-inspired, task-involving, motivational climate, they are motivated to continue pursuing involvement in a music program (Bailey, 2006; Dill Bruenger, 2019; Freer & Evans, 2019; Schmidt, 2005). Even though the findings in this study are consistent with previous research, the valuable takeaway is that this research remains consistent even through a global pandemic.

Yoo (2021) asserts that music teachers can support fundamental psychological needs, provide structure, and encourage motivation. Ms. Green and Mr. Black discussed opportunities to be counsellors during difficult times. Specifically, Mr. Black described times during live assessments when students “just needed to talk.” Conversely, a valuable lesson from this study is that while technology was used to bring people together and help them stay connected, technology cannot replace authentic relationships in a music-making community.

**The Importance of Community.** Research strongly asserts the benefits of communal music-making as this role of uniting people can meet the psychological needs of students (Evans & Freer, 2018). Self-Determination Theory posits that every person has three psychological needs: autonomy, having a sense of choice and volition; competence, feeling effective within an environment; and relatedness, feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness with others (Ryan & Deci, 2017). As school band programs can gather students in an ensemble or community and foster relatedness, each band program in this study attempted to maintain the spirit of community despite the significant adversity presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. In connecting this study to the existing body of research, the bonding hormone oxytocin is released during music-making, helping to reduce stress and boost immune function (Baker, Forbes & McLeod, 2022). This loss



of community was felt by the surveyed students, who emphatically described the significance of “not being part of a whole band” and “not being with my friends.” Despite the band community looking very different during the COVID-19 pandemic, surveyed students were willing to look past the dramatic changes and continue participating. When surveyed students were asked to describe the best part of the post-pandemic band experience, the joy of being “back together” and “seeing people” once again was the predominant response.

**The Importance of Parent/Guardian Support of Band Programs.** Surveyed parents/guardians repeatedly praised the “heroic effort” of their child’s band teachers to keep their music program going and engage with their students. Similar to the band student responses, there was frequent mention of losing so much of their pre-pandemic band program; however, they continued encouraging their children to participate and appreciated that their child’s band teacher did what they could to keep students engaged. Additional opportunities for virtual honour bands were created by the Saskatchewan Provincial Band Association, and a few surveyed parents/guardians specifically mentioned their appreciation for their child’s involvement.

**Adjusting Expectations.** The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in less playing time, less contact time, and fragile student mental health. As such, the band directors in this study adjusted their students' performance expectations and focused purely on making music in the best way possible during the height of restrictions and following the COVID-19 pandemic. They adjusted their repertoire choices and assessment practices and focused on making music to better the lives of their students during a challenging time. A post-pandemic study regarding music and mental health found that “the long-term impact the pandemic is having on kids is still being studied,” but “preliminary findings suggest broadly increased levels of depression had accelerated” (Reynolds, 2022, p.1). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the percentage of high school students who reported sadness or hopelessness jumped from 26% in 2009 to 37% in 2019, then to 44% in 2021. Many schools are doing what they can to combat this trend, focusing additional resources on counselling and various kinds of "mindfulness" training (Reynolds, 2022). In Reynold’s (2022) study, participants have found that music is a compelling meditation assist and are using it to combat depression directly. In the post-pandemic climate, one of the schools in this study is focused on using music as a therapeutic tool (Reynolds, 2022). One might assert that since the five band teachers in this study had all been musicians themselves for decades, they understood how impactful music could be for their student’s mental health, and

therefore, they each realized it was more important to focus on student mental health rather than performance standards.

**The Importance of Neighbouring School Relationships.** Consistent with Weller's (2021) findings, each band director in this study felt their relationship with the neighbouring elementary schools was significant. Mr. Gray, Mr. Brown and Ms. White directly worked with their nearby elementary schools and felt that was a benefit throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The fall of 2021-2022 saw the sharpest decline in enrolment for Mr. Black and Ms. Green, with 20 fewer students at most. Ms. Green and Mr. Black believe this decline was partially due to a lack of contact with their neighbouring elementary schools. Ms. Green and Mr. Black connected with their neighbouring schools in the spring of 2022, and the increase in their fall grade nine enrolment numbers reflect pre-pandemic times.

### ***Summary of the Sub-Questions***

Music educators can learn a great deal from the COVID-19 pandemic experience. First, there is no reason to fear losing band programs amidst extreme adversity. Band students need music and their music community for several reasons, including improved mental health. Passionate and creative band teachers can create unique opportunities for students to engage with band despite the drastic changes. Band teachers must also be willing to adjust their performance expectations which is significantly easier when there is no performance pressure. Students and their families will miss live and in-person performances; however, they are willing to perform in whatever capacity they can.

It is essential to maintain relationships with neighbouring elementary schools in any way possible. If young students cannot visit the high schools, there are creative ways to use technology to meet and inform young band students about what band is like at the high school level. As Lautzenheieser (2021) asserts, current band students are the best advocates for a band program. The student responses in this study reinforced this notion with the passionate way that they advised students considering band.

### **Returning to the Research Questions**

The information gleaned from the sub-questions will now inform the central research questions.

### ***Research Central Question One***

#### *Did the COVID-19 Pandemic Impact Band Programs?*

The findings in this study undeniably indicate that the global COVID-19 pandemic impacted band programs. The government protocols, which school division decision-makers adhered to and implemented, resulted in less contact time with students, smaller bands, and more rigorous physical and sanitary protocols. The “traditional” band program, as we would expect to see and hear it, was anything but traditional and operated with a handful of ensembles and zero extracurricular opportunities. Furthermore, some schools prohibited in-person playing during the 2020-2021 school year. Band classes operated virtually or as a general music class (a class with no performances focused more on theory and history). The following themes emerged as examples of how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted band programs.

**Physical Restrictions and Scheduling Changes.** Due to the intense physical spacing restrictions during the 2020-2021 school year, Mr. Gray, Mr. Black, and Ms. Green could only play with their students for six weeks, “half at a time,” and with rigorous physical hygiene and spacing protocols. Instrumentalists were required to adhere to strict protocols while playing for 30-minute increments to allow the aerosols to settle. Mr. Brown and Ms. White were allowed to see their students for the entire year but were not permitted to play in person.

The change in frequency of band class duration and limited student contact time forced band teachers to completely change how they delivered band. The most common complaint from surveyed students was the loss of their community and “band mates” due to shorter time frames of band class and hybrid scheduling. The student survey responses reinforced the notion that students can form strong interpersonal and group relationships in a band (Adderly, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003); many indicated that they lamented community loss due to the scheduling changes.

During the 2021-2022 school year, the band programs using quint semesters switched to quad semesters, and those not previously permitted to play received permission to do so. Band directors and band students were relieved to have more time together; however, the spacing and strict hygiene protocols remained, and band was still not “back to normal” in the conventional sense before the COVID-19 pandemic. Parent/Guardian data indicated that they were not directly affected by the scheduling changes but observed the disappointment felt by their children. Many parents appreciated the hygiene protocols, and a few said they would like them to remain.

**Restrictions on Performances and Tour Opportunities.** Due to restrictions on indoor school guests and audiences, performances and tours were limited from fall 2020 to spring 2022. Each band teacher in this study found creative ways to engage audiences through recorded performances, virtual videos, and small outdoor concerts. In this situation, all five band teachers felt the pressure of performing lessen, and each experienced a more relaxed pace. Contrarily, the loss of performances was felt by band students, as well as their parents/guardians. Several band students and band parents/guardians noted this loss as a significant negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The parent of a senior student stated they felt sad that their child's last senior band concert was "taken away" from them. Most promisingly, all five band teachers felt the lack of band trips did not affect enrolment as students continued to choose band despite not having a trip on the horizon. In contrast, surveyed students and parents/guardians often listed the loss of band trips as one of the worst parts of pandemic-band. Interestingly, most students who asserted this claim had yet to experience a band trip.

### ***Summary of Central Question One***

This study's five high school band programs experienced significant disruption to their regular band program format. Rigorous physical restrictions, schedule changes, the removal of in-person performances and, in some cases, the complete removal of in-person playing resulted in band teachers, band students, and parents/guardians adjusting their expectations and participating in a more fluid and flexible program format than their previous band experiences. Student survey data indicated that they endured the changes and continued to choose band because they "wanted to keep playing" in any capacity.

### ***Commonalities of Themes Experienced by Cohorts***

When asked if the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the interviewed band teachers, the surveyed band students and band parents/guardians, several commonalities were discovered throughout responses from all three cohorts.

**Loss.** Survey responses from band students, their families, and band teachers repeatedly underscored the feelings of loss. Each group lost many valued aspects of vibrant band communities, including routine, playing time, concerts, and band trips. Moreover, band teachers missed the community and the "welcoming environment" they had worked diligently to create. Additionally, band students missed making music with friends, and parents/guardians missed in-person concerts.

**Fear.** The global COVID-19 pandemic caused people worldwide to fear the unknown; those involved in this research study were no exception. The five interviewed band teachers wondered if their programs would recover from the dramatic changes and feared losing future students. Out of the five high school programs in this study, two school divisions dismantled the neighbouring elementary band programs entirely. They further redeployed elementary band teachers to teach other subjects. Additionally, at the high school level, Mr. Black said that “because of the quint system, some senior students found themselves without a full day of classes, and some students chose to work or do other things and cut out their electives, including band.” The loss of students at the higher grades and the potential loss of students at the lower grades was a fear experienced by the band teachers in this study.

**Perseverance.** To help mitigate this sense of loss, band teachers, band students, and parents/guardians demonstrated determination. Band teachers continuously adapted and evolved their pedagogy to fit the circumstances. Band students continued to respond as best as they could by trying new performance formats and assessment practices. Subsequently, surveyed parents/guardians encouraged their students to continue with band throughout the COVID-19 pandemic because of the many valuable skills that they wanted their children to learn.

**Gratitude.** Survey data indicated that band students and band parents/guardians were grateful for their band teachers' efforts to maintain student engagement. As a result, the five band teachers in this study felt supported by their community of students and families. Mr. Black remarked that after 35 years of teaching band, he had never experienced so many students saying “thank you” at the end of class each day. Furthermore, each band teacher in this study felt that their administration valued music education and worked continuously with each of them to support them while they adapted to dynamic regulations and adjusted their pedagogy. Moreover, parents/guardians were thrilled to be attending concerts again in spring 2022, and Mr. Black observed more parents attending performances than before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interviewed band teachers and surveyed band students and their parents/guardians collectively experienced loss and fear of the unknown as they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. Band students persevered through the new challenges as they continued their musical journey, which resulted in gratitude towards their band teachers for keeping them engaged.

### ***Summary of Commonalities of Themes Experienced by Cohorts***

This study's five high school band programs experienced significant disruption to their regular band program format. Rigorous physical restrictions, schedule changes, the removal of in-person performances and, in some cases, the complete removal of in-person playing resulted in band teachers, band students, and parents/guardians adjusting their expectations and participating in a more fluid and flexible program format than their previous band experiences. Student survey data indicated that they endured the changes and continued to choose band because they “wanted to keep playing” in any capacity.

### ***Research Central Question Two***

*What Was the Response of the Band Teachers and Band Students to the Alterations of the Band Program as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic?*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a drastic change in how band teachers, band students and parents/guardians of band students experienced a band program. According to the data from this case study, band teachers experienced serious challenges for two years as they were required to adapt continuously to the evolving protocols to keep students engaged. Consequently, unlike any other time in their careers, each band teacher was forced to reexamine their pedagogical practices, and some feared that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic would have long-term detrimental effects on their program. In short, they wondered if band students would still want to participate in band with such drastic changes. For over two years, each band teacher in this study demonstrated creativity, resourcefulness, ingenuity, and perseverance to provide their students with a meaningful COVID-19 pandemic-band experience.

**Pedagogical Changes and New Uses of Technology.** In early 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic initially sent all five band teachers and their students home, technology was the only way to communicate. At this time, the band teachers in this study learned of computer software programs that could assist in delivering band. Many students stayed in touch virtually with their band teachers during the spring of 2020; however, it was very challenging to have a band class in the way one would traditionally conceive of a band class. According to Mr. Gray, the time online with his students in the spring of 2020 became more of a check-in and hang-out. In uncertain times, Mr. Gray was thankful to see his students at any time and on any platform during uncertain times.

Each band teacher used Google Classroom, SmartMusic, online theory programs and various music recording applications to continue delivering band throughout 2020 and until June 2022. Ms. White's virtual recording, which took 100 hours to create, was successful, and her students and their families enjoyed it, but she was adamant that she would never do that again. Mr. Brown generously dedicated many hours to his students offering optional online Zoom private lessons so they could continue to improve their skills. Parent L.B. and a few others indicated appreciation for this "extra Zoom support." Each band teacher shared that although technology assisted their delivery of band, they currently use very little and prefer doing as much in person as possible.

**Creative Performance Experiences.** Guests were not allowed in any of the high schools in this study from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to the spring of 2022. Therefore, a traditional concert with a live audience was impossible. As such, all five band teachers learned to be creative in sharing students' learning with families. Examples of innovative performances included when Ms. Green and her students performed on the front lawn of their high school; Mr. Gray recorded his students playing and posting those recordings to Google Classroom for parents to view; Ms. White spent 100 hours creating a virtual video collaboration, and Mr. Black recorded his students on his iPhone and hired a professional to record students and create a "really nice band concert." Surveyed students and their families repeatedly mentioned the emotional loss of concerts and performances but expressed gratitude and appreciation for alternate performance opportunities.

**Repertoire and Assessment Adjustments.** Less contact time was detrimental to playing ability with respect to learning new skills and continuing to build from previously developed skills. Each interviewed band teacher spoke of the need to alter their repertoire selections. Ms. Green used *Flex-Band* music for her limited instrumentation, while the other four directors continued using full-band scores at a reduced difficulty level. Mr. Black, Mr. Gray, and Ms. Green asserted that their marking became more lenient and encouraging. Ms. Green remarked that her students "were going through some struggles just to be able to practice and perform at certain points, and I overlooked things that I might have been stricter about before." Each band teacher recognized that students were struggling in a precarious time and needed more support from teachers.

**Shifts in Perspectives and Attitudes.** Perspectives and attitudes towards certain aspects of band programs and music-making shifted for band teachers, band students, and parents/guardians of band students. For example, each band teacher in this study felt more empathy for their students during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Gray remarked, "anyone playing an instrument in these conditions gets my respect." Rather than worry as much about tuning and articulation, he felt that his students deserved props for playing an instrument. In addition to the shifting perspectives of band teachers, survey responses indicated a newfound appreciation for the opportunities afforded by the band program; students were not taking any opportunities for granted and expressed their gratitude. Interestingly, Mr. Black noticed that his post-pandemic concert and festival performances had drawn larger audiences than in the pre-pandemic years, indicating that parents/guardians appreciated in-person performances more than in the past. In conjunction with the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions lifting, each band program resumed with vigor and maintained healthy enrolment similar to pre-pandemic times.

#### ***Summary of Research Central Question Two***

Surveyed band students and the parents/guardians of band students indicated that they felt the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and, further, experienced band through a vastly different lens. Most band students did not enjoy band through the COVID-19 pandemic lens as much as they did in pre-pandemic times; however, band students responded with dedication and appreciation amid great adversity. Despite the restrictions and drastic changes, the five high schools in this study retained healthy enrolment and were operating in vibrant music-making communities at the time of the interviews. Thus, the concern felt by each band teacher that the COVID-19 pandemic would negatively impact their enrolment and music community did not come to fruition.

#### ***Commonalities of Themes Experienced by Cohorts***

When discussing their responses to the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, interviewed band teachers, surveyed band students, and band parents/guardians experienced several commonalities.

**Continued Interest.** The findings in this study parallel findings in the existing scholarly literature (Allsup, 2012; Culp & Clauhs; Varner, 2019) that music teachers must understand the community they serve to maintain student interest and enrolment. Specifically, they must understand the students with whom they work. The best interest of band students was first and



foremost in all five programs. Each band teacher carefully understood their community circumstances to meet the demands head-on. Ms. Green explained that her students may not have been “playing as high-level repertoire as they usually would be playing at this grade” but felt her students would “eventually catch up because kids are so adaptable.” She did not worry about what her band students would sound like or how their ability had lessened. She was there to support her students and provide music education.

Surveyed band students and their families observed band teachers' efforts to keep students engaged, and as such, the students showed interest in persisting through pandemic-band. Surveyed parents/guardians spoke of band's multiple benefits, including creativity and brain development, and encouraged students to continue participating despite the changed landscape.

**Intrinsic Motivation.** When considering Deci and Ryan’s Self Determination Theory (SDT), the data from this survey fully supports the notion that the more one internalizes an action and the more the activity is assimilated to the self, the more one’s extrinsically motivated actions become self-determined. Educators, specifically band teachers, can play a crucial role in facilitating internalization by providing a sense of belonging and connectedness within their band. SDT refers to this concept as relatedness, as students feel respected and cared for, resulting in a willingness to accept classroom values (Deci & Ryan, 2000). During the COVID-19 pandemic, extrinsic motivators, such as band trips or competitions with awards, were non-existent. The skill level of bands in all five high schools declined, yet band students continued to show up, and enrolment did not noticeably decline. Of additional importance, although many surveyed parents/guardians missed attending concerts, they still encouraged their students to participate in band in any capacity. The data from this study revealed that band students are not all motivated by extrinsic rewards and were more intrinsically motivated to continue in band during the COVID-19 pandemic due to their feelings of relatedness and belonging. One might posit that the display of intrinsically motivated band students to continue choosing band during and after the COVID-19 pandemic was a relief to all involved.

**Support.** It was evident from interview and survey data that the music communities, teachers, students, and their families supported each other while navigating the uncharted waters. Surveyed students received support from family and band teachers, and surveyed band parents/guardians supported band teachers. Each interviewed band teacher described the support they gave to their students throughout their responses. Whether it was to be a “counsellor”, or

invite them to hang out in the band room while they had to teach another class, these five band directors were there for their students and supported them through the entire COVID-19 pandemic. As band student L.S. explained, “we had to space out” and be separated, “but my band director did a good job creating a strong program nonetheless.” Band parent B.B stated that they “missed seeing the band as a whole and attending concerts,” but they did “appreciate the work done to keep it going as much as possible.” Supportive communities are sustainable communities, and at the time of the interviews, the support continued, and everyone involved was pleased to have the band program back to more of its original shape.

### ***Summary of Themes Experienced by Cohorts***

When investigating the responses from band teachers, band students and band parents/guardians to the COVID-19 pandemic changes, data revealed that each cohort experienced continued interest, intrinsic motivation, and support for all involved. The collaborative environment between band teachers, band students and parents/guardians to allow for a band experience in any available capacity brought to light the supportive community in which each high school band program functioned. The students’ interest in band remained because they felt supported and were intrinsically motivated to continue in the COVID-19 pandemic-band experience. Surveyed student data revealed that they could think far beyond the extrinsic motivators such as trips and festivals and instead consider the musical and life skills they would continue to gain. Students also welcomed the joy of playing an instrument and the continued, albeit different, music community.

### ***Research Central Question Three: What Was the Outcome for Band Students and Band Programs with Respect to Retention and Attrition?***

Band program retention is a lingering issue in the current post-pandemic climate (Weller, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted band programs, and many stakeholders wondered how band programs would survive and recover. Although many programs experienced significant attrition, some programs maintained reasonable enrolment despite the restrictions implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the height of its restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic challenged band teachers to find creative ways to engage musically and socially with remote and hybrid classes. For many band students, “finding ways to negotiate musical learning, feel ownership, and navigate social activities during COVID-19 proved difficult” (Nickel, 2021,

p.10). Data from this study suggests that the five interviewed band teachers successfully navigated the COVID-19 pandemic and maintained healthy enrolment in their band programs.

Before COVID-19, each high school band program had several concert bands, jazz bands and extracurricular ensembles. During the height of restrictions, in the 2020-2021 school year, each school’s ensembles were reduced in size due to hybrid scheduling, and there were no extracurricular groups. Nevertheless, each high school noticed a minimal enrolment decline in the 2021-2022 school year and, more importantly, at the time of the interviews. Mr. Brown’s enrolment did not fluctuate at all, and he believed his contact with grade six to eight students throughout the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted those numbers (see table 1.1).

**Table of Enrolment Data 1.1**

High School	Pre-pandemic Band Student Enrolment 2019-2020	Pandemic-Band Student Enrolment 2020-2021-2022	Post-Pandemic Band Student Enrolment 2022-2023
Ms. Green (9-12)	85	70	64
Mr. Gray (8-12)	220	200	213
Mr. Black (9-12)	150	120	130
Ms. White (9-12)	75	70	73
Mr. Brown (9-12)	120	120	120

**Enrolment Data.** Before COVID-19 and the government-prescribed protocols, all five high schools in this study had healthy student enrolment. Each band program consisted of several concert bands, jazz bands and numerous extracurricular offerings (which differed from school to school). Despite the drastic changes in band program delivery, the 2020-2021 school year enrolment was not affected in any band program. A decline in enrolment at the grade nine level occurred for Mr. Black and Ms. Green in the 2021-2022 school year as they could not collaborate with the neighbourhood schools. Government and school division COVID-19 protocols did not allow guests in any schools or the mixing of student cohorts. As such, elementary students could not visit their neighbouring high schools, and Ms. Green and Mr. Black could not visit their elementary counterparts. Ms. Green, in particular, felt that the lack of collaboration had a “negative impact” and contributed to the slight yet noticeable decline in

enrolment of her 2021-2022 grade nine band. Mr. Gray also experienced a slight decline. Mr. Brown and Ms. White maintained similar enrolment throughout, to which Mr. Brown directly credited his relationship with the younger students.

### ***Summary of Research Central Question Three***

During the interviews, each band teacher reported increased opportunities for collaboration with their elementary counterparts in the spring of 2022. Moreover, all reported enrolment numbers that mirrored pre-pandemic times. It is important to note that none of the interviewed band teachers believed the COVID-19 pandemic-band experiences, such as the loss of band trips, had directly impacted their enrolment.

### ***Commonalities of Themes Experienced by Cohorts***

The data reveals that each band program experienced positive enrolment results through the COVID-19 pandemic. Band teachers, band students and band parents/guardians shared similar experiences among all five high schools.

**Integrated Efforts Among Administration for Support of Band Programs.** The stakeholders that kept the five high school band programs operating through great adversity were multifaceted. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when new protocols were created, each of the five band teachers worried about how it would affect their band programs and enrolment. They soon learned that their administrators were interested in assisting in several capacities. In particular, Mr. Gray felt that his upper administration had a “passion for keeping kids playing.” He arrived at meetings with decision-making administrators already deciding how to keep band fully functional; they sought resources such as circus tents and plexiglass on his behalf. At the next level, high school principals collaborated with band teachers to build a band schedule that was functional for each school. Next, the band directors worked diligently to provide music education to their students through a new lens. Lastly, band students and their families continued to show up, embrace the changes and demonstrate gratitude for the efforts to keep them engaged. The integrated efforts of administrative decision-makers, band teachers, band students and band parents/guardians empowered the band programs in this study to continue through tremendous adversity.

**Familiarity and Connection Between High Schools and Neighbouring Schools.** The discrepancy in enrolment numbers between the band teachers who met with their upcoming students and those who did not is clear. Three high schools that had teachers maintain connection

with their elementary counterparts saw virtually zero enrolment fluctuation in the fall of 2020; the two band teachers who could not collaborate in the same capacity lost students at the grade nine level. Grade eight students were not permitted to play in the neighbouring schools, yet those familiar with the high school teachers from previously working closely with them chose to take high school band. One might infer that the band parents/guardians who knew their child's future band teacher may have encouraged grade nine participation.

### **Summary of Commonalities of Themes Experienced by Cohorts**

Results from this study indicate positive outcomes for all involved in this research. Band teachers maintained numbers in the pandemic that remained close to the status quo regarding band student enrolment and eventually saw a return to their pre-pandemic schedules and enrolment numbers. The band students who persisted through the COVID-19 pandemic-band experience regained their community of "bandmates" and eventually looked forward to many live performances and a band trip. Additionally, parents/guardians of band students looked forward to live performances, and audiences were larger than they had been in pre-pandemic times. Moreover, they were experiencing the satisfaction of seeing their child back in their community and enjoying the many benefits of taking band.

The data from stakeholders associated with each high school in this study revealed various positive answers when participants were asked about enrolment consequences when band programs face incredible adversity. Band teachers, band students and band parents/guardians navigated the COVID-19 pandemic with patience, creativity, determination, and support. The benefit of the connection between neighbouring elementary schools and the high school program was magnified by the 2021-2022 enrolment numbers and underscored by the rebound in the 2022-2023 numbers when collaboration resumed. The positive outcomes for those who persisted through the COVID-19 pandemic-band experience is most noteworthy from this study's response and have a lot to teach us about moving band programs forward in a post-pandemic climate.

### **Limitations of Research**

A common criticism of any research is whether it can be applied to everyone, and every context experienced. The idea of generalizability was previously discussed as a limitation of qualitative methodology in Chapter three. This concept again can be explored as a limitation of this particular research study. As defined by Creswell and Creswell (2012), generalizability is the

external validity of applying results to new settings, people, or samples. Even with an understanding of the importance of generalizability, it was impossible for me to interview everyone involved. As such, it was important for me to intentionally select the participants to ensure that I had a range of teacher and student demographics.

As a researcher, I recognize there are limitations in research. However, in qualitative studies, the use of purposeful sampling prioritizes gaining a rich understanding of a particular phenomenon and can use generalizability by discovering study results that are useful to a broader group of people (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Morrow, 2007). Due to the volume of stakeholders in Saskatchewan band programs, I could not interview every band teacher, band student, and parent/guardian of each student. Since I could only interview some band teachers, band students and band parents/guardians, I opted for depth rather than breadth to gather a manageable volume of data. I compensated for the small percentage of high schools in this study by choosing a diverse range of schools from around the province. Another limitation of the study was that the questions for the band students and band parent/guardian surveys were written in such a way that there was no opportunity to follow up to prompt or clarify responses. As such, not having the opportunity to ask further questions was a limitation as, in some cases, band students were brief with their answers. Further elaboration could have provided more clarity on some of the briefer responses.

While the findings in this study provide rich information from 109 band students, this is only a fraction of the band students in Saskatchewan high schools. Five band directors with 500 band students cumulatively were interviewed for this study. From those band programs, 109 students and 35 parents/guardians completed the anonymous survey representing approximately 20% of the possible responders. I am unaware if the student and parent/guardian cohort participants were distributed evenly among the five different schools and school divisions, which could be seen as a limitation in the study. However, it was intentionally designed to protect student identity and not reveal any identifying information from the student that could link them to a school or teacher. Although the survey data may not have accurately represented the views of all students, those who responded shared valuable information concerning their experiences. Because I took a sampling of geographical and diversity of school demographics, I hope that even though this is a small-scale study in scope, it can represent a larger sample of the population.

Furthermore, I once again acknowledge my position as an experienced band director and how that might influence the approach and analysis of the study. As a band director, I view the educational teaching and learning process through this lens, however, I took measures to ensure that this did not influence the questions or results in my analysis. I recognize that as a music teacher with 27 years of experience, I come from a position of experience and knowledge about music teaching and have vast experience with the processes and procedures associated with running band programs. I have worked alongside many music teacher colleagues, students, and their parents, and therefore have many ideas regarding successful practices and strategies resulting in attrition and retention. As such, it is common for researchers with lived experience to seek out the answers and results that align with their own experiences and desired interpretation. It is possible that I could be biased in interpreting my results. As an experienced music educator before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, I needed to approach this study from a non-presumptuous perspective. My pandemic-band experiences would not necessarily be similar to any of the studied high school pandemic-band programs, and I wanted my experiences to be independent of the study results. Therefore, I made sure not to include any aspects of my band program, such as scheduling, alternate programming or retention information when seeking and discovering common themes. Furthermore, I set aside my personal biases when deciding which questions to ask. I did not look for themes that only resonated with my pandemic-band teaching experiences and did not ask leading questions. Lastly, I sought unfamiliar contexts with varying demographics when choosing high schools. All of these aforementioned considerations indicate a concerted effort to minimize researcher bias and obtain authentic data collection with objective and impartial data analysis.

### **Research Impact**

The findings from this study deepen our understanding of the nature of band enrolment and what motivates students to continue choosing to take band in the post-pandemic climate. Practitioners, administrators, and school division decision-makers might learn valuable information should we re-encounter a disruption of this magnitude. Most significantly, this study can reassure music educators that music students will likely remain and return to band programs if a pandemic occurs again. We need not fear that band students will not return, as seen in all five high schools. Not only was there very little attrition during the height of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, but current enrollment is also similar to pre-pandemic times. Band directors do not

need to fear doing things differently or trying new things while in the height of a pandemic under challenging restrictions. The interviewed band directors looked forward to continuing with some of their newly created activities, such as outdoor concerts, passion projects and small ensembles. Creativity, patience, and extra effort are required from all stakeholders to provide a meaningful band experience during an unconventional time.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research was unique in exploring the experiences of band teachers, band students and parents/guardians in five high school band programs before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Each participant spoke from their point of view, which exemplified the uniqueness and commonalities of music programs and the individuals that make up such programs. The literature review on factors affecting retention and attrition conducted for this study illuminated a void in research on this topic as it relates to band programs that have undergone and recovered from a global pandemic which significantly impacted band programs. Therefore, there is a lot of research to explore in this area. This study aimed to capture a breadth of COVID-19 pandemic-band experiences to give a holistic perspective of pandemic-band and, in doing so, examined the band programs of five schools by interviewing five band teachers, their respective band students, and the band student's parents/guardians. I recognize that more programs could have been studied, providing more participant data and therefore, future research could invite a larger sampling of schools, teachers, students, and parents/guardians.

I also acknowledge that the current study investigated high school band programs solely in Saskatchewan. Valuable insight may be gained from studying high schools in other parts of Canada and painting broader strokes to include high school choral and guitar classes. The majority of responses were positive, and students were grateful to continue band throughout and after the COVID-19 pandemic; however, there may be a benefit to exploring the feelings of the small group of students who indicated less enthusiasm or those who did not continue playing in band.

Finally, Mr. Gray stated early in the interview that it might take the rest of his career for band students to return to pre-pandemic skill level. The notion of a delayed musical skill set could also be applied to delayed beginner band enrolment. Exploring the musical backgrounds of beginner band students who had not begun band during the COVID-19 pandemic and who missed music in elementary school during the height of restrictions may have affected their



overall outlook on music and their choices to join band positively or negatively. Additional exploration of the trends of attrition and retention in high school choral programs could be beneficial in comparing enrolment with high school musicians in general.

## **Conclusions**

This study aimed to explore and understand the experiences and motivation of high school students to continue pursuing band in a post-pandemic climate. By interviewing five band directors and surveying their respective band students and band parents/guardians, several important findings and themes emerged. The findings in this study were critical in identifying how band programs fared through the COVID-19 pandemic. The data gathered from interviews and surveys provided valuable insight into the collective experiences of band students, band teachers and parents/guardians of band students before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, during the height of restrictions and in the post-pandemic climate. Interview and survey responses provided compelling evidence that music education can continue despite being faced with immense adversity, and there should be less worry that band programs would be permanently damaged by another major disruption. All five band directors in this study were innovative, motivated, and passionate about providing enriching band programs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, each band teacher focused on the mental health of their students. They made pedagogical decisions to positively impact their students' lives rather than increase their stress after encountering so much loss. Band teachers took advantage of new technology to reach students and assess students in a multitude of ways. They sought creative ways to rehearse and perform, whether outside or spread out in their spaces. The interviewed band directors adjusted their repertoire choices and assessment practices. While those not permitted to play waited for permission to resume in-person playing, they provided quality music education experiences such as music history and theory. Lastly, when permitted, they scheduled small-scale day trips within their cities to give the students a “band tour” experience.

Ultimately, once COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were lifted and schools returned to the pre-pandemic two-semester format, all five band teachers returned to programs and practices that included limited use of technology (i.e., Zoom lessons ceased; performances of concerts with live audiences resumed; performances in festivals resumed; touring opportunities and more challenging repertoire re-emerged). When choosing to be in band during the 2022-2023 school

year, band students did not know if they were resuming semesters, performing for audiences, or going on band tours. However, they did know they would continue playing their instruments and be together, making music with their classmates.

When considering Self-Determination Theory and previous retention research, the band students in this study appeared to be highly intrinsically motivated to continue choosing band. Band students' pandemic-band experiences consisted of a great deal of loss: no live concerts, no trips, and for some time, physical separation from each other. Despite this, students did not know if any of those aspects would be reversed when choosing to continue in band for the 2022-2023 school year. They only knew that they would be together making music in some way. This supports SDT in that the need for relatedness that students develop and the desire for interaction and connection with others through music is highly motivating even if they think there will be restrictions. Further, autonomy was demonstrated with opportunities such as choosing the content of their passion projects, choosing the repertoire for their small ensembles, and choosing whether to play recorded or live assessment. Finally, asserted in SDT, surveyed band students demonstrated an abundance of competence in their own skills and abilities when asked to advise future band students on the benefits of choosing band. Students were very descriptive about their musical and life skill sets and all of the skills and knowledge that they had learned from their participation in band.

This study also highlighted the importance of having supportive administrative decision-makers, supportive band parents/guardians and band students who were intrinsically motivated to continue playing in any capacity. All five band teachers reported feeling support from all administrators and band parents/guardians. The band programs in this study did not resemble their “normal” practices from March 2020 to June 2022, yet each high school’s post-pandemic enrolment statistics are similar to each other. Therefore, the results of this study should alleviate the concern that band programs may not recover when faced with extreme adversity because, with creativity and perseverance by all stakeholders, it is possible to maintain quality music education. This study has shown that band programs are able to and can return with even more enthusiastic enrolment, and that should be welcoming and encouraging news for band teachers, administrators, music students, and their parents/guardians.

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## APPENDIX A



### *Band Teacher Email Invitation*

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My name is Stacey Mortenson-Spokes. I am conducting research as part of my Master of Music Education degree at the University of Saskatchewan. Thank you for supporting Saskatchewan band students through some of the most challenging times for music programs. This letter is an invitation to participate in a substantial research project focusing on the retention and attrition of band students in the current post-pandemic climate. My supervisor in this research is Dr. Jennifer Lang, an Associate Professor in the Department of Music at the University of Saskatchewan.

If you agree to participate, you will participate in a 45–60-minute Zoom interview. Your band students and parents/guardians will also be invited to complete an anonymous survey. The questions will be related to involvement in band before COVID-19 restrictions, during the height of restrictions, and in the current program. I will conduct the surveys and interviews in October 2022 and will plan to have the interviews transcribed for February 2023. Your name and school will remain anonymous, and the research will protect the privacy and confidentiality of your replies. The University of Saskatchewan requires that we store the information for five years. Once the data is no longer required and following the period of storage needed, the data will be destroyed beyond recovery.

Participating in this study includes the opportunity to inform future pedagogical practices within secondary band programs by exploring student, teacher, and parent experiences. There is no cost involved in participating in the project, nor is there any compensation for participating in the study. The University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board has approved this research.

## APPENDIX B



### *Band Teacher Consent Form*

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#### *Participant Consent Form*

**You are invited to participate in a research study entitled:** Student Retention in post-pandemic band programs.

**Student Researcher(s):**

Stacey Mortenson-Spokes, Master of Music in Music Education. University of Saskatchewan, srm129@usask.ca

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:**

Dr. Jennifer Lang, Associate Professor Choral/Music Education, University of Saskatchewan, Jennifer.lang@usask.ca

**Purpose and Objective of the Research:**

- This case study aims to learn more about the retention and attrition of band program in the current post-pandemic climate

**Procedures:**

- The research activities will involve a 45–60-minute interview over the Zoom platform. The student researcher will be conducting the interview. The interview will be audio and video recorded. Please note participants may request that the recorder be turned off at any time without providing a reason.
- After your interview, and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcript as you see fit. You will have two weeks to alter or delete portions as you see fit. If there are no changes, the transcript will remain as is.
- The student researcher will be transcribing the interview.



- Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

**Potential Risks:**

- There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

**Potential Benefits:**

Participating in this study includes the opportunity to inform future pedagogical practices within secondary band programs by exploring student, teacher, and parent experiences.

**Confidentiality:**

- The results of this research will be disseminated and incorporated into a master’s thesis.
- The data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although direct quotations may be reported from your responses, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information will be removed from the report. Your school’s name will not be linked to your interview responses in the reported interview data.
- There is no guarantee of privacy with Zoom or any other videoconferencing platform. The data will be stored in servers located in Canada.
- **Zoom’s Privacy Policy - <https://explore.Zoom.us/en/privacy/>**
- The primary researcher will participate in the interview from a private space, and it is recommended that you do the same.

Please put a checkmark on the corresponding line(s) to grant or deny permission:

I grant permission to be audio recorded	
I grant permission to be video recorded	

Please only select one option below:

I wish for my identity to be confidential	
---	--

<p>I wish for my identity to be confidential, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym.</p> <p>The pseudonym I choose for myself is:</p> <p>_____</p>	
<p>You may quote me and use my name</p>	
<p>I would like to be acknowledged for contributing to the research</p>	

**Storage of Data:**

- Any notes pertaining to your participation in this confidential study and its relationship to the research objectives may be stored within the primary investigators secure USask OneDrive or in a locked cabinet in a locked office. The academic supervisor will be responsible for the data storage, and it will be kept in their office and on their computer. The data will be deleted 5 years post-publication.
- Participation in this survey is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions you are comfortable with.
- You can decide not to participate at any time by closing your browser or choose not to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with. Survey responses will remain anonymous. Since the survey is anonymous, once it is submitted, it cannot be removed.
- To protect your confidentiality, the researcher will store the record of your oral consent separately from the interview data.

**Follow up:**

- To obtain results from the study, please contact the student investigator using the information at the top of page 1. Results will be available in February 2023.

**Questions or Concerns:**

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1.
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your

rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office: [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca); 306-966-2975; out-of-town participants may call toll-free 1-888-966-2975.

I read and explained this consent form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Researcher's Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>

## APPENDIX C



### *Band Teacher Interview Questions*

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*The interview begins with a verbal consent to Appendix B consent form.*

#### **Pre-Covid:**

1. Please describe your program pre-pandemic regarding students' enrolment
2. Please describe your program pre-pandemic regarding the frequency of performances/tours.
3. Do you have a parent committee? If so, what is its role?
4. Please describe your program pre-pandemic regarding extracurricular groups.
5. Would you say there was a positive climate in the music room before the pandemic? If so, what did you do to foster that environment?
6. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, please tell me how you structured your band program regarding the class structure, ensembles, co-curricular ensembles, sectionals, etc.

#### **Post Covid:**

7. Please describe your current enrolment.
8. Which pre-pandemic practices do you plan to maintain moving forward?
9. Did technology platforms help or hinder your band program during the COVID-19 pandemic? Are you still using it?
10. How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced your repertoire choices?
11. Have you made changes to your assessment practices? If so, what have you done?
12. How would you compare your teaching pace from pre-pandemic times to the current day?
13. How does your current schedule differ from your covid schedule?

14. Many touring and travel opportunities for music programs were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Did you experience this, and if so, how did traveling or not traveling impact your program?
15. Are there positive outcomes or opportunities that resulted for you and/or your music ensemble during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## APPENDIX D

### Department of Music University of Saskatchewan

#### PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN POST-PANDEMIC HIGH SCHOOL BAND PROGRAMS

We are looking for volunteer band students and parents/guardians of band students to take part in a study of:

### **Student retention in post-pandemic band programs**

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to share your experiences in band during the height of pandemic restrictions and post-pandemic.

***Your participation would involve completing an online survey that will take approximately 15 minutes.***

Find the *Parent/Guardian Survey* here:



Find the *Student Survey* here:



For more information about this study  
please contact:

***Stacey Mortenson-Spokes, Department of Music***

Srm129@usask.ca

This study has been approved by the  
University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board



## APPENDIX E



### *Student Preamble*

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Thank you for agreeing to answer some questions for me today. Your participation in this survey will help me better understand the reasons students continue to participate in band after Covid 19 restrictions were lifted. For this questionnaire, I ask that you carefully consider each question. You are also welcome to pass on any questions. You can decide not to participate at any time by closing your browser or choose not to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with. Survey responses will remain anonymous. Since the survey is anonymous, once it is submitted, it cannot be removed. I appreciate your honesty in answering these questions as your answers will have no effect on your grade in band or your relationship with your band director as they will not have any knowledge about which students participate or do not participate in this research. Eventually, I will write a research paper that reports what you tell me, but I will never use your real name, only the pseudonym of your choice that you provide to me. It should take approximately twenty minutes. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

## APPENDIX F



### *Student Consent Form*

---

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: Student Retention in post-pandemic band programs.

**Student Researcher(s):**

Stacey Mortenson-Spokes, Master of Music in Music Education. University of Saskatchewan, [srm129@usask.ca](mailto:srm129@usask.ca)

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:**

Dr. Jennifer Lang, Associate Professor Choral/Music Education, University of Saskatchewan, [Jennifer.lang@usask.ca](mailto:Jennifer.lang@usask.ca)

**Purpose and Objective of the Research:**

This case study aims to learn more about the retention and attrition of band program in the current post-pandemic climate.

**Procedures:**

The research activities will require band students/parents to sign into the survey using a QR code provided. The Survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

**Potential Risks:**

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

**Potential Benefits:**

Participating in this study includes the opportunity to inform future pedagogical practices within secondary band programs by exploring student, teacher, and parent experiences.

**Confidentiality:**



The results of this research will be disseminated and incorporated into a master's thesis. The data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences; however, the data will be anonymous. Although direct quotations may be reported from your responses, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information, such as your school or teacher's name, will be removed from the report.

This survey is hosted by Survey Monkey. Your data will be stored in facilities hosted in Canada. Please see the following for more information on the *Survey Monkey Privacy Policy*.

Teachers will not know which students/parents are participating, and therefore, your participation/non-participation will not have academic consequences.

**Storage of Data:**

Any notes pertaining to your participation in this anonymous study and its relationship to the research objectives may be stored within the primary investigator's secure USask OneDrive or in a locked cabinet in a locked office. The academic supervisor will be responsible for the data storage, and it will be kept in their office and on their computer. The data will be deleted 5 years post-publication.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Participation in this survey is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions you are comfortable with. You can decide not to participate at any time by closing your browser or choose not to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with. Survey responses will remain anonymous. Since the survey is anonymous, once it is submitted, it cannot be removed. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on the student's grade.

**Follow-up:**

To obtain results from the study, please contact the student investigator using the information at the top of page 1. You are welcome to print the screen if you would like a copy to keep for yourself. Results will be available in February 2023.

Questions or Concerns:

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1.
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office:

ethics.office@usask.ca; 306-966-2975; out-of-town participants may call toll-free 1-888-966-2975.

By completing and submitting this questionnaire, your free and informed consent is implied and indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study.

## APPENDIX G



### *Student Survey Questions*

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1. Since this survey is anonymous and we won't be using your legal name, what would you like your pseudonym to be?
2. What grade are you in?
3. How long have you participated in your high school music program?
4. Is your band program offered as a class or extra-curricular?
5. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, did your band play in music festivals and perform concerts?
6. Does your band run all year or for just part of the year?
7. How often do your rehearsals/classes take place?
8. Why did you choose to participate in band this year?
9. Do you think that participation in band supports your academic goals? Why or why not?
10. How do you view your participation in band within the larger context of your experience in high school?
11. What are the highlights of your band experience?
12. What about band participation do you find meaningful?
13. After you graduate, what do you think will be the skills you carry with you from band?
14. What do you think your parents would say are the benefits of your participating in band class?
15. Are there any drawbacks or challenges to participating in band class?
16. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your band program at school? Did it change your band experience?

17. Did your band perform during the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, describe the performances.
18. What were the aspects of pre-pandemic band that you missed?
19. What are some of the adaptations or changes that occurred because of the COVID-19 pandemic that you liked?
20. Is there anything you would like to keep from the COVID-19 pandemic-band experience?
21. Is there anything you never want to experience again from the COVID-19 pandemic-band experience?
22. Now that restrictions have been lifted, what is the best part of high school band?
23. From your point of view, how do you view participation in band compared to other subjects?
24. What would you tell young students who are considering joining band?

## APPENDIX H



### *Parent/Guardian Consent Form*

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You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: Student Retention in post-pandemic band programs.

**Student Researcher(s):**

Stacey Mortenson-Spokes, Master of Music in Music Education. University of Saskatchewan, [srm129@usask.ca](mailto:srm129@usask.ca)

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:**

Dr. Jennifer Lang, Associate Professor Choral/Music Education, University of Saskatchewan, [Jennifer.lang@usask.ca](mailto:Jennifer.lang@usask.ca)

**Purpose and Objective of the Research:**

This case study aims to learn more about the retention and attrition of band program in the current post-pandemic climate.

**Procedures:**

The research activities will require band students/parents to sign into the survey using a QR code provided. The Survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

**Potential Risks:**

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

**Potential Benefits:**

Participating in this study includes the opportunity to inform future pedagogical practices within secondary band programs by exploring student, teacher, and parent experiences.

**Confidentiality:**

The results of this research will be disseminated and incorporated into a master's thesis. The data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences; however, the data will be anonymous. Although direct quotations may be reported from your responses, you will be

given a pseudonym, and all identifying information, such as your school or teacher's name, will be removed from the report.

This survey is hosted by Survey Monkey. Your data will be stored in facilities hosted in Canada.

Please see the following for more information on the ***SurveyMonkey Privacy Policy***.

Teachers will not know which students/parents are participating, and therefore, your participation/non-participation will not have academic consequences.

**Storage of Data:**

Any notes pertaining to your participation in this anonymous study and its relationship to the research objectives may be stored within the primary investigator's secure USask OneDrive or in a locked cabinet in a locked office. The academic supervisor will be responsible for the data storage, and it will be kept in their office and on their computer. The data will be deleted 5 years post-publication.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Participation in this survey is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions you are comfortable with. You can decide not to participate at any time by closing your browser or choose not to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with. Survey responses will remain anonymous. Since the survey is anonymous, once it is submitted, it cannot be removed. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on the student's grade.

**Follow-up:**

To obtain results from the study, please contact the student investigator using the information at the top of page 1. You are welcome to print the screen if you would like a copy to keep for yourself. Results will be available in February 2023.

Questions or Concerns:

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1.
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office: [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca); 306-966-2975; out-of-town participants may call toll-free 1-888-966-2975.

By completing and submitting this questionnaire, your free and informed consent is implied and indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study.

## APPENDIX I



UNIVERSITY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN

### *Parent/Guardian Survey Questions*

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1. Since this survey is anonymous and we won't be using your legal name, what would you like your pseudonym to be?
2. How many children do you have in the band program?
3. Did you participate in music programs when you were in high school? Yes or no
4. How long has your child been in the band program at their school?
5. Is it important that your child participates in band? Why or why not?
6. How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact your child in terms of participating in the band program?
7. Do you feel your child's musical experience was positively or negatively affected by the changes made to the band program during the COVID-19 pandemic?
8. Was there a specific change to the band program during the COVID-19 pandemic that affected you as a parent?
9. With the lifting of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, how does your child's band program function now?
10. Is there anything you would like the school's music program to keep from the COVID-19 pandemic-band experience?
11. Is there anything you would like the school's music program never to have to offer again?