

# Breaking Barriers for American Band Directors and Bassoonists

## Part 1: Introduction and Review of Past Research

Ariel Detwiler  
Bloomington, Minnesota

*The article appearing below is a modified version of the first sections of the author's 2023 University of Minnesota doctoral thesis. The second and third portions of this important work, including data from the author's survey of when and how bassoonists got their starts, as well as a survey of band directors' inclusion of the bassoon in their ensembles, will be printed in upcoming editions of The Double Reed.*

In 2003, I started playing the bassoon as a freshman in high school. At the time, I had heard that the bassoon was a difficult instrument, that it was only for people who were self-motivated, hard-working, talented, and had the financial means to take lessons. My high school band director, Matthew Moore, looked at the flute section of thirty people in a ninety-person band and said, "We need bassoons, French horns, and tubas. All of these are great for getting scholarships in college and for moving up to this school's top band quicker." He brought in professional musicians to demonstrate these three instruments for us. Since I had already learned a few instruments by my freshman year, I was excited to consider trying something new.

Once I got the chance to play the bassoon, I knew it was my instrument. I remember taking the instrument home before I knew how to put it together. I put the case on the dinner table and excitedly showed my family, none of whom knew what a bassoon was. Since that moment, I have pursued the instrument with such curiosity that I now have two completed college degrees in bassoon performance, have created a freelance and teaching career as a professional, and am now completing a doctoral degree in Bassoon Performance and Pedagogy at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. I selected a secondary area of study in pedagogy because I realized there aren't many professional bassoonists who specialize in performance and research, as well as the fundamentals of teaching beginners.

Walking into middle and high school band classrooms as a professional bassoonist today, none of the "qualifications" to play the bassoon have changed since I started playing the instrument. I've heard band directors tell their students that if they wanted to switch to the bassoon, they had to have straight A's, they had to be good at their current instrument, and they had to have the financial means to afford reeds, books, private lessons, and sometimes even the instrument itself and its maintenance. On the other hand, I've had many meaningful—and often mindset-changing—conversations with open-minded band directors who wanted to expand their program by way of the bassoon. One question I wish I heard more from band directors is, "Why is the bassoon viewed this way?"

Some band directors are fascinated with the bassoon and openly encourage students to try it; others shy away from even mentioning it to their students as an option. Negative attitudes exist for many reasons, and band directors are indeed aware of them: cost, quality, and availability of instruments; their own lack of knowledge of the bassoon and how to teach it; their ability to find professional teachers and good sources of reeds; and generating consistent student interest in the instrument. The quality of future music educators' woodwind techniques education in undergraduate programs and the physical properties of the bassoon that cause common issues in performance or slower growth on the instrument compared to other woodwinds may all have direct relationships to the bassoon's reputation.

Given the low percentage of bassoonists who pursue a career in music, in many parts of the country it is difficult to find a professional bassoon teacher within an hour's drive from a willing student. This challenge of finding a teacher in any given area, combined with the high cost of the bassoon itself and the need for private lessons, creates fewer opportunities for interested students. My goal is to find a way to create access to bassoon education for all students and band directors alike, and this series of articles shares stories and outlines strategies that I hope will be valuable for the next generation.

## **The Knowledge Barrier**

Due to their level of personal connection with their students, band directors (defined here as teachers of elementary, middle, and high school band students) are the most important agent in identifying potential bassoonists. Unfortunately, not all band directors have confidence in their knowledge to teach the bassoon, and not all of them have connections with local professional bassoon teachers. This means that even if a student begins on the bassoon, they may end up learning largely on their own—often with just a fingering chart and a book designed for full band use. This self-teaching can easily lead to learning the bassoon incorrectly, which then sets the student back when they do find a teacher and must then relearn even the most basic concepts. What, or who, is to blame for this? Certainly not the student or the band director. Perhaps the resources provided are the cause?

Allow me to present another possibility: perhaps the non-bassoonist band director's fundamental knowledge of the bassoon is falling short due to an imbalance in techniques courses in the undergraduate music education curriculum meant to prepare them for a career in music education.

Despite even the best of efforts, most collegiate woodwind techniques courses do not have enough time to provide students with the experience necessary to teach every woodwind. A recent study on teaching effectiveness of secondary instruments in preservice music teachers presented a compelling argument to support this conclusion. In their 2018 study, Powell, Weaver, and Henson examined the difference in the teaching ability of music education students based on their primary instrument background.<sup>2</sup> Two sets of fundamental techniques were assessed in a ten-minute lesson conducted by each student in both brass and woodwinds: assembly/posture/hand position and tone production/articulation. The study spanned four years at two different institutions, focusing on only woodwind and brass techniques classes. Each instructor for the course had more than three years of public school teaching experience.

The researchers found that students who did not already play a woodwind as their primary instrument had significantly more difficulty in teaching woodwinds effectively. However, even students who played a woodwind as their primary instrument had lower average effectiveness scores when teaching woodwinds than when teaching brass. In addition, the difference in score average based on the student's primary instrument was significantly greater when teaching woodwinds.

Twice in their conclusion, Powell, Weaver, and Henson mentioned the need for more time to be devoted to woodwind techniques classes in comparison to brass:

Scores for teaching effectiveness were higher for all participants, regardless of primary instrument background (i.e., brass, woodwind, percussion, string, piano, voice), when teaching brass instruments. This may be due to the greater homogeneity of brass instruments. Because woodwind instruments have fewer transferable skills between instruments in some cases (e.g., embouchure formation on flute is quite dissimilar to embouchure formation on clarinet), perhaps woodwind instrument techniques should be given more emphasis in the curriculum than brass techniques.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, they suggested that the issue of woodwind students teaching brass more effectively than teaching woodwinds might be remedied “by requiring additional semesters of woodwind techniques study, or by reconfiguring mixed-instrument family format courses into like instrument split-family or individual instrument formats.” In fact, many smaller universities have been using this kind of progressive curriculum for many years.

In a 2017 survey of instrumental techniques classes by researchers Wagoner and Juchniewicz, it was found that “the majority of methods courses (a) are taught by one instructor, (b) meet twice a week, and (c) have a class length of 50 minutes.”<sup>4</sup> However, there are certain schools that divide courses into specialized groups of flute, single reeds, and double reeds, and even schools that teach private lessons for the double reeds in a semester separate from the other three woodwinds. At DePauw University (Greencastle, Indiana), for example, the music education program has for more than ten years taught woodwind techniques in a two-semester setup, mainly due to the availability and knowledge base of its primarily adjunct woodwind professors. This curriculum divides the woodwind techniques course into two parts—one semester in a traditional class setting for flute, clarinet, and saxophone, and one semester dedicated to oboe and bassoon private lessons for each student, divided evenly between the adjunct professors for 6-8 weeks per instrument. At one point, the idea was proposed to focus on only one double reed instrument for an entire semester, but the professors eventually agreed that it would be better to split the semester between the two instruments, as they are equally important to learn. DePauw University has an extremely high placement rate of music educators in Indiana schools at 97%, and though the three teachers of the woodwind techniques courses are all performers first and foremost, they demonstrate a strong ability to teach pedagogy to both music education and music performance majors.

Despite the work that may go into making curricula more successful in teaching the woodwinds, there are still educators (former students of these curricula) who undervalue

the experiences of the techniques classes they once took. Powell, Weaver, and Henson mention in their background research for their study that:

Beginning music teachers often find secondary instrument classes to be among the least valuable aspects of their undergraduate education (Conway, 2002). Even high school and college band directors have rated the value of these classes behind student teaching, band ensembles, methods courses, conducting classes, applied lessons, and jazz ensemble (Jennings, 1989).<sup>5</sup>

The low importance of techniques classes to current music educators raises the question of the purpose of these courses. Applied instrumental faculty teach most woodwind techniques classes at 38%, followed by music education faculty who account for 34%.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the effectiveness of techniques courses stems from the instructor's capability to teach pedagogy in harmony with performance technique. Based on the curricular standards for performance or educational degrees, it would be unusual for an adjunct performance faculty member to have full training in pedagogy, and vice versa for professors in music education to have extensive training in performance practice.

No matter how many woodwind techniques courses there may be, there will always be a varied teaching focus for each class based on the instructor's own knowledge base. One institution may put an emphasis on the performance skills of their students and assure they have basic knowledge of how each instrument is played, while another may focus on how to teach the instruments, learning a lower level of skill on each instrument but having a higher understanding of teaching techniques with all levels of students. In a study on the methods of teaching secondary instrument techniques classes, the researcher found that when faculty at certain institutions were asked to rank instructional goals for techniques classes based on the emphasis given to certain topics, pedagogical knowledge ranked above diagnostic/perceptive skills and performance proficiency, but participants commented on the variance of these rankings, depending on who is teaching which class.

Regardless of the varied curriculum for the class, I find that most woodwind techniques courses end with a final portfolio of materials related to all woodwinds. The beginning music teachers in the methods course effectiveness study agree: "the goal of the techniques courses should be helping teachers learn to think as creative, independent problem solvers who are adept at finding and using resources."<sup>7</sup> This goal is attainable in both instrumental performance skill and pedagogy with the right teacher, but the research shows that even over decades of woodwind techniques courses, students simply need more time to learn the woodwinds well in order to feel prepared for a career in music education.

A few key issues arise when it comes to achieving the goal of effective bassoon education in techniques courses. First, there is no existing research that specifically targets the effectiveness of learning to teach the bassoon from the woodwind techniques curriculum. Second, there is very little scholarly writing on beginning bassoon methods and techniques outside of woodwind techniques textbooks. Third, there is no research suggesting that the bassoon requires more time to learn to a fundamental beginning band level than other woodwinds, despite this being in my experience a popular opinion among band directors and woodwind techniques instructors. These issues not only mean fewer available beginning

bassoon materials for woodwind techniques teachers and students to find, but also leave no solid argument for extending the curriculum of woodwind techniques classes based solely on the need for more double reed education. Furthermore, even if there was solid evidence to argue for another semester of woodwind techniques, collegiate music schools usually have no way to make room for another techniques course in the curriculum without cutting another fundamental class.

In a study on the delivery of techniques courses, researchers found that “instrument groupings, schedules, credit allocations, instructor backgrounds, class content, and instructional priorities vary widely from school to school and even class to class within schools,” and that “greater coherence and/or uniform expectations across secondary instrument classes may be viewed as desirable and appropriate by some music education faculty, but an infringement on academic freedom by other.”<sup>8</sup> Another curricular setback is outlined by a study from 2006:

As pressures increase on music education curricula to address a greater number of professional teacher standards using fewer credit hours, faculty fear they may have to consider less specialized class configurations that allow for fewer minutes of instructional time or exposure to fewer instruments.<sup>9</sup>

If collegiate woodwind techniques curricula cannot be effectively extended at all schools to provide better pre-service education, perhaps professional bassoonists should start to offer other solutions. One such solution is offering a more concise post-baccalaureate education on the bassoon to band directors. In 2022, Dr. Shannon Lowe conducted a study on the state of the bassoon in schools, surveying 402 music educators. This survey included the number of student bassoonists in the program; the working condition of the instruments owned by the school; music educators’ comfort level with the bassoon; and access to supplies, music, instruments, and knowledge. Lowe also assessed her findings based on rural, suburban, and urban locations. When asked if their instrumental methods class adequately prepared them to start bassoonists in their program, it was found that 36.9% answered “No,” “Never took a methods class,” or “My methods class did not include instruction on bassoon,” meaning these participants would most likely not feel prepared to teach bassoonists. However, when asked if they were more likely to start bassoonists in their programs if they were offered a bassoon-specific clinic for music educators, 43.2% answered “Yes,” and 42% selected “Maybe,” showing that educators are open to learning more about the bassoon.<sup>10</sup>

Adding bassoon education clinics for music educators after college would be beneficial in many ways. Doing so would help create positive professional relationships between bassoon teachers and band directors. It would also create more revenue for bassoon teachers who presently often find only a few students per school. Finally, it would provide specialized access to bassoon knowledge for band directors who might already be seeking such understanding but may not know where to find it—allowing them to seek funding for such courses as professional development through their school budget.

## Understanding Issues of Access

As a professional bassoonist with local connections to the world of education, I often have conversations with band directors about acquiring instruments and recruiting bassoonists. The most popular topics are first how to afford a new instrument or how to repair/maintain old ones, and second, if it's worth finding a private teacher for their students. These questions never have a quick answer, but the frequency in which I receive them leads me to have my own questions about the state of music education. The barriers in place must be related to financial support as well as distance—especially in rural areas—between bassoon students and qualified bassoon teachers. I started my research trying to understand what kind of schools, students, teachers, or general areas might need the most help removing these barriers, with the intention being to create more opportunities for bassoon study where those opportunities are most desired.

In 1991, a survey of high school seniors revealed that 30.9% of them were enrolled in a music performance class. In 2008, that same age group's music enrollment had decreased to 21%.<sup>11</sup> In another 2008 survey, studying school principals' perspectives on the state of music in K-12 schools, it was discovered that 98% of schools had some kind of music offering, but of those, only 34% required music. Ninety-three percent of schools offered band regardless. When principals were asked about the barriers keeping them from fully supporting their music programs, 32.5% of answers were categorized as financial/budgetary. The least popular answers, at 7.1%, were issues unique to their school, such as decreasing enrollment, socioeconomic status, or the special focus of the school.<sup>12</sup>

Socioeconomic status (SES) has been an important factor in most education studies that focus on access. SES is a measure of financial need in a community based on the amount of free or reduced lunches that are given to students during the school day. Schools are measured from low SES (students needing a lot due to family income struggles) to high (students needing very little). Low SES has been found to affect music programs significantly at the K-12 level. In a follow-up to the 2008 principal's perspective survey in 2015, it was clear that when schools with a lower SES were compared to their higher SES counterparts, they had less probability of having a dedicated space for music.<sup>13</sup> Low SES was also a significant factor for low participation in music ensembles in a 2011 study collecting high school music student demographics.<sup>14</sup> If low SES already has a deterrent effect from music programs, it is undoubtedly a factor in choosing an affordable instrument.

Many bassoon teachers and band directors have said that students should have good financial standing to play the bassoon. However, a very large number of public schools in the US have bassoons that can be loaned to students, and many colleges that offer music as a major or minor also own at least one bassoon and lend them to students for free or for a small fee if they play in an ensemble. It seems then, that regardless of socioeconomic status, young people can play a bassoon *at a lower cost* than a more popular instrument like the clarinet or saxophone. Adding in private lessons with a specialist, that cost does go up, but the increasing number of schools, music booster clubs, and outside music organizations that provide scholarships and grants to students for music expenses means that the bassoon can absolutely become an instrument on an even playing field with the other band instruments when it comes to finances.

As of 2018, Minnesota has one of the lowest percentages of students with low SES, at 36%.<sup>15</sup> Primarily southern states have higher rates of low SES, from 50-60% in Oklahoma, Georgia, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Alabama, while Mississippi has the highest rate of low SES students at 74%. No matter how different the data is, 36% of all students in any given state is still an extremely high number of children. Often the cost of the bassoon affects more than just students with low SES; the price tag scares many students away from even trying the instrument, no matter their family's SES. It seems then, that the only way forward is to help band directors find ways to afford an instrument for their program and to create a culture around the bassoon that is inclusive, open minded, and motivation driven. Music is often a lifelong journey for any student, and the cost of a bassoon should not necessarily have to land on a student until they are out of school and can make their own income.

Other issues discovered to be related to music enrollment are “background characteristics like family composition, parental education, academic achievement, native language, and race/ethnicity—what sociologists of music education might refer to as ‘determinants of inequality’.”<sup>16</sup> In Abril and Elpus’s study on high school music student demographics, they describe the issue:

White students were found to be a significantly overrepresented group in school ensembles and Hispanic students were found to be significantly underrepresented. The overrepresentation of white students may not come as a surprise to many music educators who have anecdotally noted that students in their ensembles are overwhelmingly white, even while the overall ethnic make-up of their school changes rapidly (Abril, 2009a).<sup>17</sup>

The lack of Hispanic students, Abril and Elpus say, should be worrisome, as the Hispanic population in schools has risen in the United States from 6% in 1972, to 11% in 1987, to 21% in 2007. It was even suggested that the increase in the Hispanic population in schools may have been the cause for a decline in music programs.<sup>18</sup>

Another barrier with a significant effect on students’ probability of enrolling in music was home life. Seventy-nine percent of music students in the Abril/Elpus demographic study came from a two-parent home, while 20.6% came from a one-parent home.<sup>19</sup> Once again, this brings us back to the financial barrier of affording the study of music. Practically, a one-parent home may not have as much income or resources (including time) as a two-parent home. This doesn’t necessarily mean that a student from a one-parent home should choose to stay away from music altogether, but perhaps it means these students might need a bit more encouragement and support to become part of the program.

While all the aforementioned barrier discoveries are important to consider, the most significant of all was the difference in music offerings based on location. In their 2008 survey study of K-12 music departments through the view of the principal, Abril and Gault found that “rural schools were found to provide significantly less [music course offerings] than their suburban counterparts [which] is consistent with prior research in arts education.”<sup>20</sup> Lowe’s 2022 study, “The State of the Bassoon in Music Programs across the U.S.” shows a significant difference between rural music programs and urban or suburban music programs. In surveying 402 music educators around the country, Lowe found that 31.2% of schools in rural areas do not own a bassoon. Bassoons that were owned by schools in

rural areas were found to be mostly in fair, poor, or broken condition. Of rural programs, 59.4% did not have a single bassoon student despite 69% of schools owning bassoons, and only 17% of respondents felt they had adequate financial support to successfully run their music programs. The biggest difference between rural areas and urban/suburban areas was found in the number of students taking lessons with a private instructor. “Only 17.7% of rural respondents said that their students take lessons with a private instructor,” while that number jumps to 70–80% in urban and suburban areas. It is clear that the financial deficit in rural areas mentioned previously has a direct correlation with the availability of bassoons and the number of students in the area.<sup>21</sup>

Research on music in rural schools is consistent in mentioning barriers as well as solutions. Common barriers mentioned that are specific to rural school music programs include low funding for repairs or new instruments, low enrollment, one teacher for all grades who usually teaches all music classes and gives private lessons, frequent teacher turnover, and low-quality or out-of-date rehearsal spaces. However, Vincent Bates proposes that how we view these issues is due to the concept of “urbanormativity,” a term coined by critical rural theorists Gregory Fulkerson and Alexander Thomas:

Cities are associated with a range of positive values: prosperity and progress, education and refinement, cosmopolitanism and diversity. In contrast, those living in the country are associated with poverty and backwardness, ignorance and crudeness, boredom and homogeneity. Moreover, as the world becomes increasingly urban, the effect is not only demographics but cultural as well.<sup>22</sup>

Bates introduces the argument that “Urbanormativity [...] can have a negative impact on rural music teachers and students by setting expectations for ‘excellence’ in music teaching and learning that are based on realities, beliefs, values, and possibilities associated more strongly with metropolitan areas.”<sup>23</sup> Of the 13,491 school districts in the United States, 9,642 (71%) are considered either rural or town districts, meaning they are located a significant enough distance away from metropolitan areas. While student population may vary based on the district’s location, it’s important to remember that despite the location of the school, Abril and Gault found that 93% of schools offered band in 2008. Each of those schools has at least one band director and at least one band. If 71% of the country’s school districts are struggling with the same issues collectively, they certainly deserve the most attention.

Most resources on rural music teaching suggest the same solution: focusing on community engagement. Not at all a new concept, community engagement has been written about for the last hundred years in music educators’ journals. In 1933, the former president of the Music Teachers National Association, William Arms Fisher, wrote of his concerns that a “revolt of youth” led to a decline in children studying the piano, and suggested that instead of forcing children to “stiffly” listen to music at home, they should experience participatory music in schools. In 1961, Gladys Tipton, former director of music at Illinois State University, wrote that “the musical riches of the world, past and present, are the cultural heritage of every child,” and believed that “there is as much merit in studying general music as there is being in band and orchestra.” In 1972, MENC director Joan Gaines presented a public relations workshop for music teachers starting and growing music programs that



introduced specific points of action focused on community engagement.<sup>24</sup> Daniel Isbell, in his research on music education in rural areas, suggests band directors become a stable part of the community, integrating their band into casual performance settings that support other parts of the school. This may include helping with school planning, connecting with administration and staff, and adapting to the new environment and the community if they are starting a job in a new area (Isbell, 2005). A 2005 feature in *Teaching Music* on music teacher Stan Johnson from the rural community of Shickley, Nebraska, places a strong emphasis on making the entire community a part of the program and letting success breed success. He also receives as much help as he can get from school administrators, parents, other teachers, boosters, members of the community, and the nearest music store, despite it being located about an hour away.<sup>25</sup>

In 2008, Abril and Gault wrote, “Teachers might serve as agents for change most effectively when informed with an understanding of the ways in which the educational community think about music schools.”<sup>26</sup> Abril and Elpus’s 2011 study on the demographics of music students ended with suggestions on how to encourage students with low socioeconomic status to study music. These include helping with providing instruments, providing transportation to events outside the school day, aiding with the cost of private lessons, establishing a scholarship fund, and placing individualized attention on the school/district situation based on the needs of the community. At the end of their survey study on the teacher’s perspective on factors impacting music programs, Abril and Bannerman suggested the strongest course of action to reduce the possibility of teacher and budget cuts is creating district-wide music advocacies to show how the specific music program is important to the school or local community. A short feature on music teacher Chandran Daniel from Hinsdale, IL in *Teaching Music* presented his own suggestions for teaching band in under-resourced communities. Daniel suggested fostering personal connections with each student and understanding their lived experiences, starting beginning band with limited options that can be expanded on later, seeking multi-year lease agreements for larger instruments, and direct fundraising in the community from grant organizations, donors, and corporate sponsors.<sup>27</sup>

Vincent Bates brought all these points together to suggest that the rural community is in fact not at a loss due to the barriers placed in front of them, but when viewed from their own perspective, the cultural norms of rural life can be an advantage when it comes to sustaining music programs through community support. The “barrier” of being isolated from other music teachers geographically can serve to form close bonds with teachers of other subjects within their school in order to immerse themselves in the culture of the community and feel less isolated. Low enrollment can be seen as an advantage, as it will allow teachers more time to work with individual students. Low funding may not be as much of a barrier as it may seem since rural communities may not need high-end performance facilities or equipment to be seen as successful. Bates then offered advice for teachers who are not used to teaching in the rural environment. These points are focused on immersing oneself in, understanding, adapting to, maintaining, and preserving the culture on which these schools were founded.<sup>28</sup>

One story stands out as an inspiration for building a bassoon community in rural areas, though it could very well apply to any community. In 2021, Dr. Sasha Enegren moved

from New York to Murfreesboro, Tennessee, with the prospect of securing a tenure track academic bassoon job at Middle Tennessee State University. In her one-year appointment as Assistant Professor of Bassoon, she dedicated herself to chipping away at the barriers that she knew faced band directors and bassoonists in the area: knowledge, finances, and resources in general. Enegren felt a strong responsibility as a member of the faculty to not only represent her university through service, but also to become a part of the community. Recruitment was part of the reason she set out to help boost the bassoon community in Tennessee, but the foundation of her motivation was in education and outreach. When she asked local band directors why they didn't have bassoonists in their program, they always said, "Because I'm not comfortable with teaching bassoon," reaffirming her understanding that a knowledge deficit in band directors was the real reason for the lack of bassoonists in the area.

Enegren had experience building bassoonists before, with great results. When she worked at Montclair State University, she set 50% of her budget aside for oboe and bassoon outreach to middle and high schools. While in New Jersey, she had access to funds from a Victoria Foundation grant that allowed her to provide free lessons, reeds and even a new instrument to students, creating a new generation of bassoonists at the local performing arts high school, and giving them a strong chance at being a first-generation college attendee. Eventually, in Tennessee with the same goals, she sent hundreds of email invites to multiple bassoon-specific events for all levels, funded by the university. She worked to present the bassoon to schools free of charge, with the intent to switch some students from other instruments to the bassoon. She then created a bassoon clinic that included three hours of bassoon instruction, chamber music rehearsals, and chamber music performances. Free handouts and reeds were given to the students, some of whom traveled from up to two hours away to come to the clinic. The draw from all over the state showed that there was a need waiting to be filled—and Enegren was in the right place. She required her music education majors in techniques classes to be part of the bassoon events she organized, filling the information sessions with things she would have wanted to know about the bassoon when she was their age.

Feedback from the students was extremely positive. One clinic that focused on all-state mock auditions had middle schoolers critique each other as an exercise, and every single comment was positive and supportive of the other young bassoonists. Many bassoonists who went to the event realized for the first time that they weren't the only bassoonist in Tennessee—and they were thrilled to hear and play with their bassoonist peers for the first time. Enegren says that a huge draw for both bassoonists and band directors for these events was having a repair technician on site offering free repairs for attendees. Band directors were invited to participate in or observe all sessions. Enegren truly achieved the complete community engagement that Abril, Bannerman, Elpus, Gault, Wilcox, and Perry have all mentioned, and she did it in just a year's time.<sup>29</sup>

Research on the bassoon's role in a rural environment is still lacking, but Lowe's research suggests that there may be a remedy at least for solving the knowledge deficit in rural music educators seeking to learn more. Financial barriers in front of students and teachers in a rural environment being able to afford and maintain bassoons have yet to be addressed in scholarly research. Bates' argument that low funding is not a deficit for rural

communities specifically questions the need for “expensive instruments and performance venues.”<sup>30</sup> It may be that the bassoon is not absolutely necessary to have a successful rural music program, but I have certainly received enough interest from rural band directors to see that it could be a valuable and unique addition for the student who might want to try it.

An unexpected silver lining that has emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic is online learning. Private teacher specialists are now expanding their studios worldwide, and it doesn't seem to be a trend that will disappear any time soon. Many teachers have thrived in this new online environment, thanks to the help of great technology like high-quality microphones, cameras, and music software, and this could be a game changer for rural environments that can't normally find a bassoon teacher or reed maker living in their area. If bassoon teachers reach out more to rural environments to suggest this type of learning, our bassoon community as well as the number of resources and knowledge readily available regardless of geographic location or finances, could expand exponentially.

Rural band directors are some of the most creative, multitalented music teachers in the country. They often need to rewrite music to fit their instrumentation, find ways to meet students one-on-one before or after school, and work with other teachers and coaches to find solutions for scheduling conflicts and general event planning. Credit should be given to the desire of a band director to provide their program with a bassoon, as it is yet one more piece in their creative web provided for their students.



*Dr. Ariel Detwiler, owner of ACDC Reeds, is an active bassoon teacher, freelance performer, and reed maker based in Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

## Endnotes

- 1 Shannon Lowe, "The State of the Bassoon in Music Programs across the U.S." *The Double Reed* 45/2 (2022): 67–79.
- 2 Sean Powell, Molly Weaver, and Robin Henson, "Relationship of Preservice Music Teachers' Primary Background and Teaching Effectiveness of Brass and Woodwind Techniques Classes," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 27/3 (2018): 38–50.
- 3 Powell, Weaver, and Henson, 47.
- 4 C. Wagoner and J. Juchniewicz, "An Examination of Secondary Wind Instrument Methods Courses," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 26/3 (2017): 56.
- 5 Powell, Weaver, and Henson, 39.
- 6 Wagoner and Juchniewicz
- 7 C. Conway, J. Eros, R. Hourigan, and A.M. Stanley, "Perceptions of Beginning Teachers regarding Brass and Woodwind Instrument Techniques Classes in Preservice Education," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 173 (2007): 44. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40319469>
- 8 J.R. Austin, "The Teaching of Secondary Instruments A Survey of Instrumental Music Teacher Educators." *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 16/1 (2006): 60. doi:10.1177/10570837060160010107
- 9 Austin, 60.
- 10 Lowe.
- 11 K. Elpus and C.R. Abril, "High School Music Ensemble Students in the United States: A Demographic Profile," *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 59/2 (2011): 128–145. doi:10.1177/0022429411405207
- 12 C.R. Abril and B.M. Gault, "The State of Music in Secondary Schools: The Principal's Perspective," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 56/1 (2008): 68–81. doi:10.1177/0022429408317516
- 13 C.R. Abril and J.K. Bannerman, "Perceived Factors Impacting School Music Programs: The Teacher's Perspective," *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 62/4 (2015): 344–361. doi:10.1177/0022429414554430
- 14 Elpus and Abril.
- 15 Nation's Report Card Website. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/4eeLm23> on 3/24/2021.
- 16 Elpus & Abril, 129.
- 17 Elpus & Abril, 141.
- 18 Elpus & Abril, 141.
- 19 Elpus & Abril
- 20 Abril & Gault, 79.
- 21 Lowe.
- 22 V. Bates, "Thinking Critically about Rural Music Education," *Visions of Research in Music Education* 32 (2018): 3. Retrieved from <http://www.rider.edu/~vrme>
- 23 Bates, 4.
- 24 D. Isbell, "Music Education in Rural Areas: A Few Keys to Success," *Music Educators Journal* 92/2, (2005): 30–34. doi:10.2307/3400194
- 25 Ella Wilcox, "It all depends on you," *Teaching Music* February 2005: 26–31.
- 26 Abril and Gault, 81.
- 27 P. Perry, "Strategies for Teaching Brass & Woodwinds in Under-Resourced Communities," *Teaching Music* October 2018: 49–50.
- 28 Bates.
- 29 Sasha Enegren (bassoon teacher) in discussion with the author, April 2023.
- 30 Bates, 6.