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.[2] 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.[3]

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."[4] 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).[5]

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%.[6] 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."[7] 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."[8] 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.[9]

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.[10]

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%.[11] 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.[12]

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.[13] Low SES was also a significant factor for low participation in music ensembles in a 2011 study collecting high school music student demographics.[14] 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%.[15] 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'."[16] 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).[17]

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.[18]

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.[19] 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."[20] 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.[21]

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.[22]

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."[23] 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.[24] 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.[25]

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."[26] 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 orgamizations, donors, and corporate sponsors.[27]

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.[28]

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.[29]

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

Back to Table of Contents

communities specifically questions the need for "expensive instruments and performance venues."[30] 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.

Back to Table of Contents

Breaking Barriers for American Band Directors and Bassoonists

Part 2: Bassoon Origins Survey

Ariel Detwiler
Bloomington, Minnesota

The article appearing below is a modified version of the second part of the author's 2023 University of Minnesota doctoral thesis. The first part of this important work was published in our previous journal (DR Vol. 47, No. 2) and the third part, including data from a survey of band directors' inclusion of the bassoon in their ensembles, will be printed in an upcoming edition of The Double Reed.

The Surveys

Over the years, I have met and worked with many amateur and professional adult bassoonists, bassoon teachers, bassoon students of all levels and ages, and band and orchestra directors of all ages and levels. From our shared experiences with the instrument, much about young bassoonist demographics, their origin stories, and the barriers they face when learning the instrument are already generally known, even without concrete evidence to back it up. For example, all teachers, students, and band directors know that most bassoonists start on another instrument or have some musical background before learning the bassoon. But do we know why? Do we know exactly what the trends are? Do we know which instruments tend to switch to the bassoon most frequently, or the reasons students have for switching? Throughout my research, I realized that while bassoon teachers, band directors, and students may see the answers to these questions as common knowledge, they would at the same time likely all have slightly (or greatly) different answers based on their individual lived experiences.

To more clearly articulate the details of how bassoonists become bassoonists in the United States, it was essential to go straight to the source. To gather this data, I created two separate surveys: one for bassoonists who started playing the bassoon in public schools in the USA (that data being presented in this article), and one for current and former band directors teaching in the USA (appearing as a future journal article). Over 250 individuals from more than 26 states completed the two online surveys. Ultimately, understanding the trends and issues of a bassoonist's journey combined with the specific barriers that band directors face with the bassoon may lead to a better understanding of how to build a better foundation for beginner bassoonists across the country.

Bassoon Origins Survey

The bassoon origins survey was created to better understand trends in when, how and why bassoonists start learning the instrument, as well as to find possible trends in the barriers

they face along the way. I applied for ethics approval for this survey through the IRB and received approval as exempt. The survey was distributed online via email and social media, with three qualifications to create more concise results: 1) The person must be 18 years of age or older at the time of filling out the survey, 2) The person must identify as either a primary bassoonist or play bassoon as a strong and regular secondary instrument, and 3) The person must have studied in a public primary or secondary school in the United States. Graduation year, school location, and current occupation of the bassoonist were not factors in this research; the questions were designed to assess possible barriers to bassoon access in the collective United States regardless of these demographics. Filtering out unfinished or duplicate surveys from the final data, 189 bassoonists from 26 states participated in this survey. Below are the results.

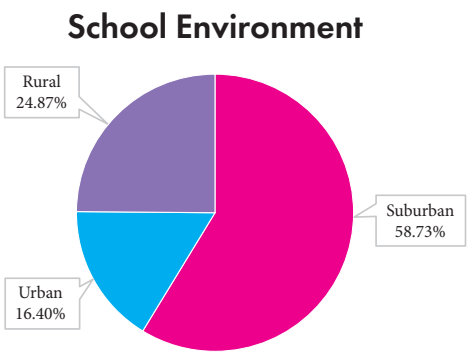
Bassoon Origins Survey Results

The survey consisted of eleven core questions. Questions 1–9 are represented through graphs, while questions 10–11 were long-answer questions, discussed in the next section.

Q1.

In what type of environment was/is your elementary, middle or high school where you played/play the bassoon?

- Suburban 111
- Rural 47
- Urban 31

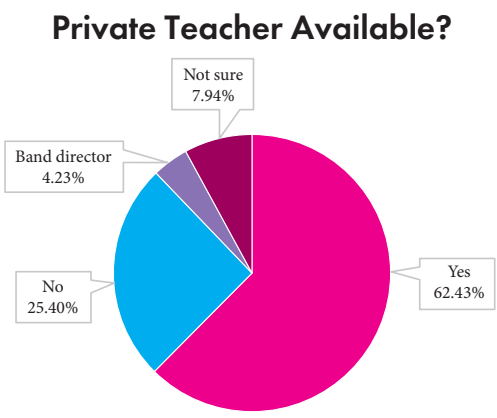


Back to Table of Contents

Q2.

Did/do you have access to a bassoon teacher in your location for in-person lessons when you started the bassoon? (regardless if you studied with them or not)

- Yes, there were bassoon teachers offering lessons 118
- I could not find any teachers available 48
- I'm not sure/didn't check 15
- My band director was a bassoonist and taught me the bassoon 8



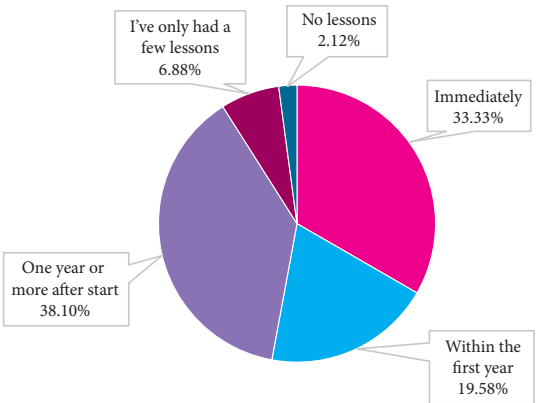
Note:
Almost 67% of bassoonists had a teacher available to help (professional or band director bassoonist) who was a bassoon specialist, regardless of if they took lessons or not.

Q3.

If you did take bassoon private lessons for at least 3 months consecutively, please indicate when exactly you started taking private lessons after you started learning the instrument.

- I learned on my own for more than a year but ended up taking private lessons eventually. 72
- I did not learn anything on my own – I took lessons immediately when I started bassoon, either from my band director or a private bassoon teacher. 63
- I learned on my own at first, but started taking lessons within the first year of playing the bassoon. 37
- I have taken a bassoon lesson here and there but have not taken bassoon private lessons for any significant amount of time with one teacher. 13

When did you start taking lessons?



Notes:

- *Almost 98% of bassoonists took at least a few lessons with a teacher at some point.*
- *91% of bassoonists took lessons for at least three months at some point.*
- *The most popular trends were starting lessons right away (33.33%) or starting lessons more than a year after starting to play the bassoon (38.10%).*

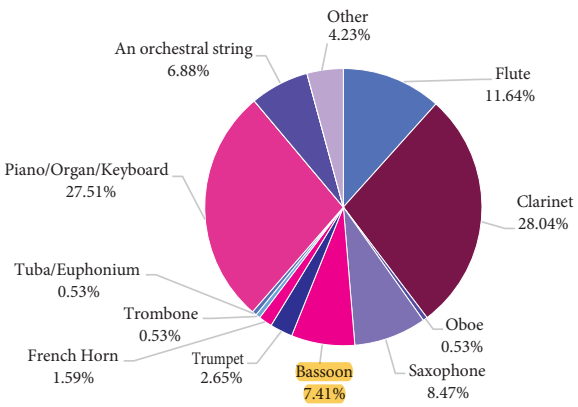
Back to Table of Contents

Q4.

What instrument was the first one you ever learned?

- Flute 22
- Clarinet 53
- Oboe 1
- Saxophone 16
- Bassoon 14
- Trumpet 5
- French horn 3
- Trombone 1
- Tuba/Euphonium 1
- Piano/Organ/Keyboard 52
- Voice 0
- An orchestral string 13
- Guitar/Bass 0
- Percussion 0
- Other 8

First Instrument Learned



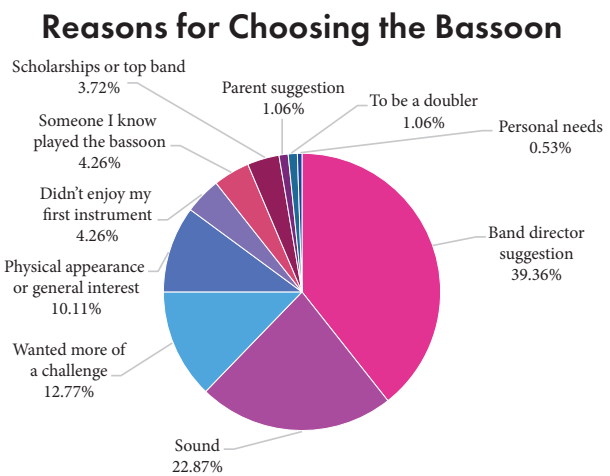
Notes:

- *Top answers: Clarinet (28.04%) and Piano/Organ/Keyboard (27.51%).*
- *Almost 93% of bassoonists who still play today started on a different instrument, indicating some musical background and knowledge of notes and rhythms before starting the instrument.*
- *48.68% of bassoonists still playing today who started on different instrument started on a woodwind instrument (other than bassoon). Only 5.30% switched from brass, and 6.88% switched from an orchestral string instrument.*

Q5.

Which of the following was your #1 strongest reason for choosing the bassoon? (Choose one only)

- My band director suggested it (whether you wanted to or not) 74
- Sound (you saw a demonstration, watched a video, or heard a soloist play). 43
- I wanted more of a challenge than my first instrument 24
- Physical appearance (without hearing the instrument at all) 19
- Someone I know played the bassoon 8
- I didn't enjoy my first instrument 8
- I wanted scholarships for college, or I was motivated to move up to the top band faster. 7
- To be a doubler 2
- Parent suggestion 2
- Personal needs (ex. Wanted own stand to see better) 1



Notes:

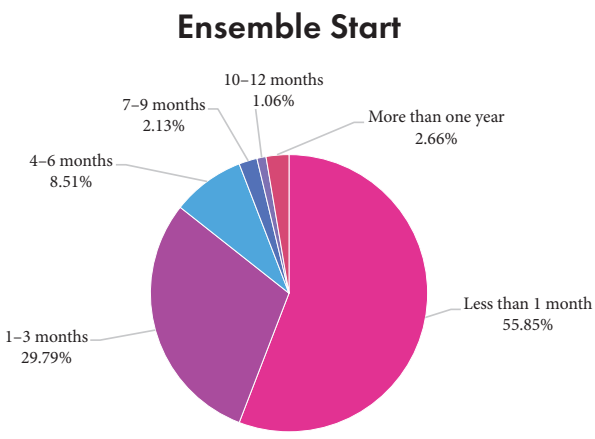
- *Band director suggestion was the #1 reason*
- *Sound was the second most popular reason to play bassoon*

Back to Table of Contents

Q6.

When you started the bassoon, how soon after you had the instrument in your possession did you start playing in an ensemble?

- Less than 1 month 105
- 1–3 months 56
- 4–6 months 16
- 7–9 months 4
- 10–12 months 2
- More than one year 5
- I have never played in an ensemble 1



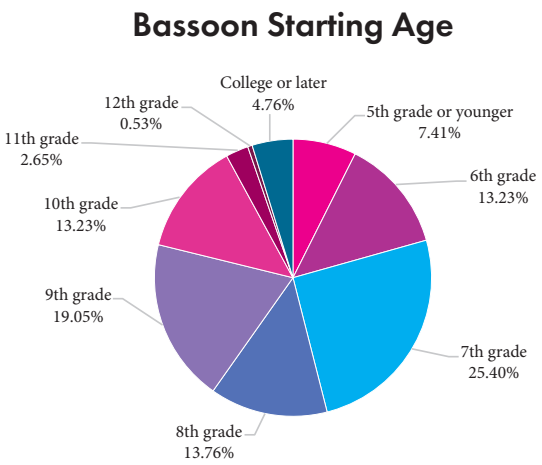
Notes:

- *Nearly 56% of bassoonists started playing in an ensemble within one month of starting to learn the instrument.*
- *Nearly 86% of bassoonists begin playing in an ensemble within the first 3 months of study.*
- *Answers to Q6 and Q7 (below) show that 87% of students who started within 3 months were in the age groups of 6th–10th grade, with significant emphasis on 7th grade.*

Q7.

How old were you when you started learning the bassoon?

- 5th grade or younger 14
- 6th grade 25
- 7th grade 48
- 8th grade 26
- 9th grade 36
- 10th grade 25
- 11th grade. 5
- 12th grade 1
- College or later 9



Notes:

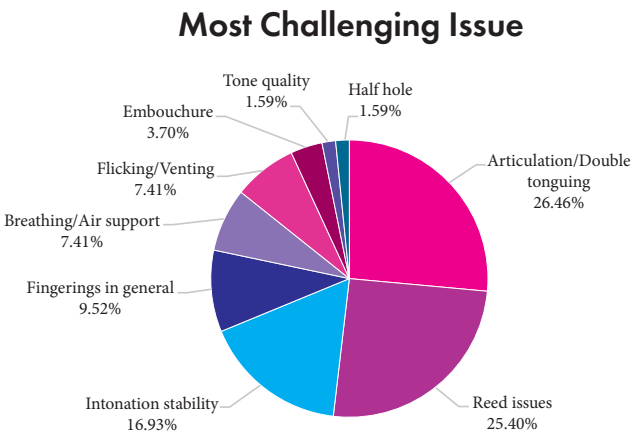
- *7th grade is the most common starting age for bassoonists at 25.40%.*
- *9th grade is the second most common starting age at 19.05%.*
- *84.67% of bassoonists switch sometime between 6th and 10th grade.*

Back to Table of Contents

Q8.

Which of the following techniques have you struggled with the most throughout your time as a bassoonist? (not which one you dislike—but which one is most challenging to remember or execute)

- Articulation/Double tonguing 50
- Reed issues 48
- Intonation/Stability 32
- Fingerings in general 18
- Breathing/Air support 14
- Flicking/Venting 14
- Embouchure 7
- Half hole 3
- Tone quality 3



Notes:

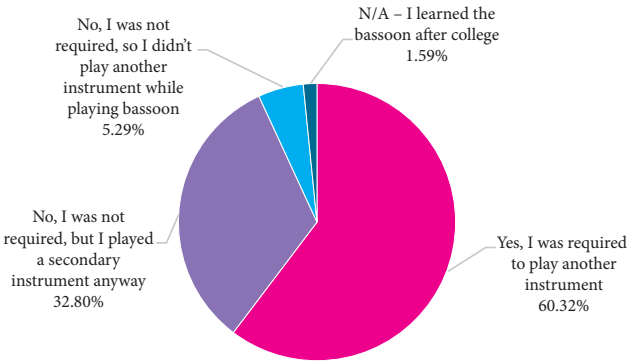
- *Most popular answers are Articulation/Double Tonguing (26.46%) and reed issues (25.40%).*

Q9.

Were/are you required to play a secondary instrument for marching or pep band in high school or college that was not the bassoon?

- Yes, I was required to play another instrument 114
- No, I was not required, but I played a secondary instrument anyway. 62
- No, I was not required, so I didn't play another instrument 10
- N/A – I learned the bassoon after college 3

Secondary Instrument Continuation



Notes:

- *60.32% of bassoonists are required to play another instrument throughout high school and college for marching or pep band.*
- *93.12% of bassoonists continue to play a secondary instrument whether they are required to or not.*

Back to Table of Contents

Bassoonists in Their Own Words

Bassoonists have never had a one-size-fits-all journey to finding the instrument. Though their origins are a bit more diverse, it is important to understand all the ways in which lifelong bassoonists came to play the bassoon, as well as how they became motivated to learn the instrument. This survey showed that nearly 93% of respondents started their musical journey on a different instrument, which means we can start to notice trends in their reasoning for these switches by listening to their stories, and thus develop a successful method of nurturing more lifelong bassoonists. In the next section, I present a number of answers to survey questions 11 and 10 (in that order to allow for better flow in this article) to let bassoonists say in their own words how they came to play the bassoon and to share thoughts on any barriers they faced in choosing and continuing to play the bassoon throughout their life. (Note: Responses have not been edited for grammar or spelling.)

Origin Stories

Q11: If you'd like to tell me a brief version of your personal beginning bassoon story, good or bad, please do!

Band Director's Suggestion

The most cited reason for musicians playing the bassoon is that they receive a band director's suggestion. Some of the most common reasons a band director suggests a change of instrument are when that student is either a great or mediocre musician at their current instrument or is bored with their current instrument. Some students are just great at their instrument but are seeking more of a challenge. One bassoonist said, "I was really good at sax, clarinet, and bass clarinet in high school, so my band director encouraged me to learn bassoon." In some cases, switches facilitated by music teachers are simply to fill a need. One bassoonist claimed that they started playing bassoon for the spring musical, *My Fair Lady*, and another said that their orchestra director was buying a bassoon for the school and wanted to make sure someone was playing it.

Once in a while, there are just too many kids in any given section to make playing in band fun:

> I became an instrument geek the day the band director in my elementary school came in to demonstrate instruments we could learn to play. My music teacher suggested clarinet, so I started with that. I (and my parents) were sort of surprised at how quickly I became somewhat proficient at it, and was 1st chair in the band by the end of the year. To my parents' surprise, I didn't lose interest after a few months, but rather sought out more lesson books and music to play. I got to junior high school and looked around 7th grade band and saw several dozen clarinet players. I wasn't sure I wanted to face that much competition, so I switched to bass clarinet. There were still 5 bass clarinets in the band. I was happy playing bass clarinet, but I think my band director realized I'd be bored with the bass clarinet parts if I stayed there.

All these stories have one common thread: a band director encouraged a student to try something new, and therefore created a positive change for that student.

No Interest in Other Instruments

Many bassoonists in this survey tried the instrument due to a lack of interest in their first instrument(s) or a failure to succeed at their first instrument. One bassoonist says,

> I began playing clarinet in 6th grade and I HATED it, although I loved being in band. I had been constantly asking to switch instruments, and when I brought up bassoon (not even knowing what it really was), my teacher lent me one and I've been playing ever since.

A student with plenty of musical experience explains how the bassoon captured their interest:

> I started the summer between 5th and 6th grades. My older sister brought home a bassoon from the middle school I would be attending in the fall. I had already played piano, flute, saxophone, baritone, trombone and continued piano lessons all through high school. None of those previous wind instruments held my interest. My father played trombone in a community band and I would go to rehearsals with him to observe. One bassoon in the band—I loved that she was the only one and not one in a big section. That drew me to the bassoon. When I started 6th grade I was put directly into the 8th grade band. First piece was Mozart 40 with tenor clef. My dad taught me to read tenor clef and I was hooked.

One bassoonist who started playing the bassoon at age forty in a community group got their start on clarinet, but quickly grew bored with the instrument—the politics of the section leader positions held by clarinetists more experienced than themself kept them from being able to even audition to become first chair. The band bought a used bassoon at their request, and they enjoyed it far better than their experiences in the clarinet section.

Technical Issues

Even when a student's interest is in a certain instrument, that does not always mean they find technical success. Many bassoonists in this survey stated that some kind of issue on another instrument caused them to try the bassoon instead. A bassoonist who now has a successful freelance career and a doctorate in bassoon shared their story:

> I really wanted to play the bassoon or the tuba when doing instrument fittings going into 6th grade. My band director was excited that I wanted to play bassoon, so he had me try clarinet, sax, and flute, but I couldn't make any of them work, and I could decently buzz, so he put me on trumpet to go on the tuba path. I ended up being a mediocre trumpet student, and no one else wanted to switch to bassoon, so he asked me if I wanted to switch after about 6 weeks. I said yes, and the rest is history!

Sometimes the suggestion to play another instrument stems from a physical issue, as it did for this bassoonist:

> As a trombone player, my band director noticed I played with the instrument pointing toward the floor. He asked to have a look at my teeth and noticing I had an overbite, suggested I try the bassoon.

Adult Learning

Some bassoonists did not find instruction until they were adults, as this student shares:

> I started taking regular lessons during my bachelors degree. I advanced much more quickly on the bassoon than the oboe (my primary). The professor even talked to me about switching major instruments. I took private bassoon lessons during my bachelors, masters, and doctoral coursework and it was my minor during doctoral studies.

Individuality

My personal switching story always includes "there were thirty flutes in a ninety-person band—so I switched to bassoon." Many other bassoonists have also experienced the desire to be in a smaller section, or to be more independent. This bassoonist's story shows the value of trying the bassoon after experimenting with other instruments:

> At the start of eighth grade, the band director knew that I wanted to play something where I would be on only one who played it. We tried the bari sax, but the instrument the school owned had problems, and it really didn't work. Then he asked me if I'd be interested in playing the bassoon—I didn't even realize the school had a bassoon.

This person goes on to say that they went home that night and worked through half of the Rubank Elementary Method—they were hooked.

Outside Influence

Even if the student does not know what a bassoon is, sometimes they end up playing it their whole life—like this bassoonist:

> I started on flute in 6th grade, there were too many flutes in 7th grade so the band director asked if any flutes wanted to switch to bassoon. I sort of knew what it was, and it sounded interesting. Never looked back.

Highly motivated musicians sometimes get bored with their current instrument and need more of a challenge. This bassoonist was inspired by a performance:

> I heard a woodwind quintet at a concert at Austin Peay State University in sixth grade. I had started band on tenor sax, and was already bored with beginning band. Luckily, when I asked, New Providence Middle School had an old dusty bassoon.

The Bassoon Origins survey results showed that nearly 93% of bassoonists who took the survey started on a different instrument, and the same amount decided to continue playing a secondary instrument in marching band despite whether or not they were required to (60% of those surveyed *were* required to play a secondary instrument for marching band). These stories are just a select handful out of an ocean of bassoonists' experiences, but a few things are clear: almost every answer includes a band director's encouragement, a previous instrument, or some kind of musical background. These findings suggest that these factors are essential to creating more lifelong bassoonists.

School Rules

Every experience is unique, as are school music programs and their rules. Some bassoonists who shared their story mentioned a specific barrier that caused them to choose the bassoon later, meaning they ended up studying a different instrument first. One bassoonist mentions that their elementary school did not allow 5th graders to start on certain instruments: "I started playing flute in 5th grade but moved on to bassoon in 6th when we were allowed to try 'auxiliary' instruments." Another bassoonist had a similar experience specific to starting double reed instruments:

> I eagerly counted the days until I could play bassoon! Clarinet was my gateway instrument. We were not allowed to start double reed instruments until after sixth grade. I leapt into learning bassoon that summer and have been playing it ever since!

One bassoonist says they did not have band class as an option below the high school level:

> In music class, I had seen the picture of the bassoon on the posters with all the instrument families, and for some reason I was enamored by this instrument. My elementary and middle schools did not have bands, so I was not in band until high school when I learned the whole woodwind family and some brass instruments before I even got to play the bassoon. I was hooked immediately and taught myself throughout high school.

These situations are unique to each school, but they are not as uncommon as one might think. Barriers like lack of band class happen most often in communities with low populations, specifically rural communities. Some 5th graders are also still too small to begin learning the bassoon. These barriers are not necessarily negative, but they certainly give us perspective on why bassoonists' paths to learning the instrument are often so unique from those of other instrumentalists.

Self-Taught Bassoonists

One very common story heard from bassoonists is about self-teaching. Many of the stories already shared here have mentioned this, and it should not be taken lightly. Self-teaching can be both a good and a bad thing. In today's world of YouTube videos and educational websites, a person could learn the bassoon fairly easily on their own to a certain level before seeking lessons, if they ever do seek further instruction. Many of the participants of the

Bassoon Origins survey learned the bassoon long before the Internet became a learning tool. Here are some parts of stories that mention self-teaching:

> I completely taught myself bassoon! I have never taken a lesson and none of my band directors ever played the bassoon.
>
> I taught myself a new note each day and played only those notes during ensemble rehearsal. By the end of the year, I had a pretty decent range.
>
> Fast forward to my freshman year, this same director handed me a bassoon and a fingering chart and told me to see what I could do. I loved it.
>
> My cousin decided she wanted to play saxophone instead so I got her bassoon. I had had oboe lessons but didn't have access to a bassoon teacher when I started so I translated what I could from oboe to bassoon. It gave me a huge step up than trying to learn completely from scratch on my own.

Some of these self-taught bassoonists mention finding a teacher later in their story, but most remain neutral in their opinion of being self-taught—they do not openly associate this experience with being positive or negative. I believe this stems from the fact that being self-taught is directly related to self-motivation, which is a determining factor in how successful a student is at learning an instrument on their own. Only 33% of bassoonists took lessons immediately after getting the instrument in their hands, and nearly another 20% took lessons within the first year of learning the bassoon on their own. When asked how quickly they were expected to play the bassoon in class after receiving the instrument, nearly 56% of participants said they started playing in band within one month of learning the bassoon. Self-motivation to learn the instrument combined with the interaction in an ensemble almost immediately become two of the most important factors to consider when starting a new bassoonist.

Bassoonist Barriers

Q10: If you encountered any challenges while you played the bassoon (finance issues like affording an instrument/reeds/accessories or taking lessons, distance to a teacher or ensemble to play with, availability of instruments, lack of good resources, etc.) please tell me your story.

Reeds

Every bassoonist who took the Bassoon Origins survey was asked to identify a barrier they faced while trying to learn the bassoon in two different ways—once in a multiple-choice question specific to what their biggest barrier was throughout their time as a bassoonist, and once in long-answer format to provide a background story. In the multiple-choice question, the answer "Reed issues" made up 25% of answers out of various technique issues, but the more specific answer of finding and affording quality reeds came up many more times in the

written stories. Even more common in participants' stories was a barrier generally defined as "Lack of resources." These barriers are important to recognize as we move forward in our efforts to recruit, retain, and nurture future bassoonists.

It is no secret that the quality of the reed makes a huge difference in sound, but one of the most common barriers for young bassoonists is finding a consistently good source of reeds in the first place. Simply put, one bassoonist wrote, "Having good reeds is a constant challenge." Another describes their experience with reeds made through big companies and sold through general music stores that do not hold their reeds to high standards of performance: "I had to play on store bought reeds which I did not know were so bad at the time." Many young bassoonists only play what they are given, and most times, they are not sure what exactly a good reed is:

> I only got Jones reeds, so I didn't know what a good reed was supposed to feel like or look like. It took me a while and [some] major changes up through my undergrad and a bit into my masters to not be fighting my reed and instrument to play.

Though many may not realize it early on, bassoonists who do not have another bassoonist to play with regularly usually have no concept of what the bassoon should sound like. One bassoonist describes this in relation to reeds:

> I had no idea what a good bassoon sound was. I started on bass clarinet and the sound concept between the two is quite different. I had no money for lessons and my band director was a brass player. In college, finances kept me from learning/buying all the things for reed making, so I always struggled to have a good reed to practice on.

Personal finances usually have a strong impact on having a great source of reeds, as this bassoonist testifies to: "Reeds were always an issue, particularly as a beginning high school player who couldn't afford much. I limped through on some very bad reeds."

Lack of Finances

The bassoon is not an instrument that is typically easy to afford. All the factors that contribute to having a great foundation on the instrument are mentioned in survey answers at some point as a financial barrier: reeds, renting or buying instruments, lessons, books and music, rides and gas, and reed tools are all mentioned. One bassoonist shares their story:

> I had to work to pay for my lessons, books, and reeds. I found rides to and from lessons as my parents were farmers and not available. The instrument was a Fox and owned by the school. I never owned a bassoon all through school, including college, they were always supplied and very few others played them. Didn't buy my own until 30-ish years after college when I realized I missed playing. Got a bargain one in my late 50s.

One bassoonist describes their dire reed situation: "I would play on the same 1–2 reeds for months and years because I simply could not afford to pay for them." Sometimes, help comes along. One bassoonist describes how their private teacher helped their parents purchase

their instrument, and another describes their story here: "My family was really poor and we couldn't afford any of the reeds or accessories. Thankfully my middle and high school directors both knew our family well and added it to their budget." Many bassoonists in the survey describe difficulty finding affordable reeds and instruments, even after college. "Bassoons are expensive and my family made sacrifices to afford a nice one," writes one bassoonist. Many of these bassoonists describe borrowing instruments for many years in high school and college, even as music majors. Almost all of them mention how the low quality of the instruments held them back from their full potential in some way.

Distance

Location is one of the main barriers to accessing a specialist bassoon teacher. Many bassoonists mention the distance they had to travel to find a teacher as being a major reason for their struggle to learn the bassoon. Though almost 98% of bassoonists surveyed claimed to have had private lessons at some point with a bassoon specialist, 38% of participants reported not having lessons until after the first year of playing the instrument. This bassoonist did not have their first lesson for a while:

> There were no teachers within an hour radius of me when I started bassoon in high school. I ended up going into music education in college, and I didn't have my first bassoon lesson until I was studying in college.

Others describe driving over an hour, or up to 180 miles away to reach a bassoon teacher. Some had basic lessons with their band director:

> The nearest bassoon teachers were in the cities, 45 min–hour from where I lived. From 5th–11th grade, I would have lessons with my band director, who was only able to address generic musical concerns. It wasn't until 11th grade that I finally began commuting to the city for lessons with a professional bassoonist.

Some private teachers work out a system to help students with access issues:

> I ended up meeting my first bassoon teacher (and a lifelong friend) at a symphony. He lived 30 miles away, but I was lucky enough he didn't charge me per lesson, instead per month with how ever many lessons I needed.

Lack of Educational Resources

The lack of readily available information on the bassoon and its quirks is a huge barrier for bassoonists, no matter their situation. Many bassoonists describe a lack of educational resources along their journey. This bassoonist describes a situation that most bassoonists can relate to:

> It was difficult finding an instrument, it was impossible to get any tailored feedback about why I was having difficulties (my band director knew very little bassoon-specific

> or relevant to double reeds), I was not able to take private lessons, I did not play with any other bassoonists for a long time so I had no reference for what I should sound like at what level.

Another describes the issue of finding a bassoon specialist teacher in the area:

> My first private lessons were from an oboe player. I didn't start with a great bassoon teacher until high school. When I got to college, I had to undo some things.

Other Barriers

Some barriers mentioned by bassoonists in the survey could apply to any instrument. Parental support is incredibly important, and this bassoonist describes a lack of that support:

> My parents were lukewarm about music... I got little or no support from them. More active and guiding parents might have opened more doors more quickly.

One barrier mentioned a few times is simply having small hands for the instrument. Another issue is overuse of certain bassoonists due to low enrollment:

> I required elbow surgery due to being overused in ensembles at the collegiate level. I was rehearsing 20+ hours a week on top of other courses because of lack of bassoonists within the program, and lost time for homework, coursework, self-care, and solo practice time.

Though plenty of barriers exist for all bassoonists, these stories are provided by people who still play the bassoon today, which shows a common quality of perseverance in musicians who have a true love for the instrument. Only 67% of participants reported having a bassoon specialist private teacher in the area regardless of whether they studied with them. Now that the Covid-19 Pandemic has created a new kind of normalcy for online lessons, some of the distance barriers mentioned may be less of an issue today. However, there are still plenty of issues that need new solutions if we are to move forward with the nurturing of new bassoonists.

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

Breaking Barriers for American Band Directors and Bassoonists

Part 3: Band director survey and conclusions

Ariel Detwiler
Bloomington, Minnesota

The article appearing below is a modified version of the third and final part of the author's 2023 University of Minnesota doctoral thesis. The first and second parts of this important work were published in IDRS journals 47/2 and 47/3.

What band directors tell us

While the Bassoon Origins Survey detailed in the previous article (*The Double Reed*, 47/3) was intended to identify trends in access issues for students, the Band Director Survey described here was created to identify trends in bassoon access issues for both band directors and their schools, and to better understand how band directors recruit, retain, and nurture their bassoonists. The survey was distributed electronically in April 2021 via email and social media with only one qualification: the band director taking the survey must have taught in the United States in public schools at some point. Responses were accepted regardless of whether or not a teacher's school had access to a bassoon or had bassoon students in their program and did not restrict participation based on band directors' age, experience, or retirement status. Band directors who consider themselves "bassoon specialists," defined as a musician who considers the bassoon to be either their primary instrument or a strong secondary, were also offered the opportunity to participate in the Bassoon Origins survey. Filtering out unfinished or duplicate surveys from the final data, the survey yielded responses from 56 band directors in 24 states. Their times as teachers ranged from 3 to 33 years, with an average of 13 years of experience.

Band director survey results

Q1.

What State did/do you teach in primarily?

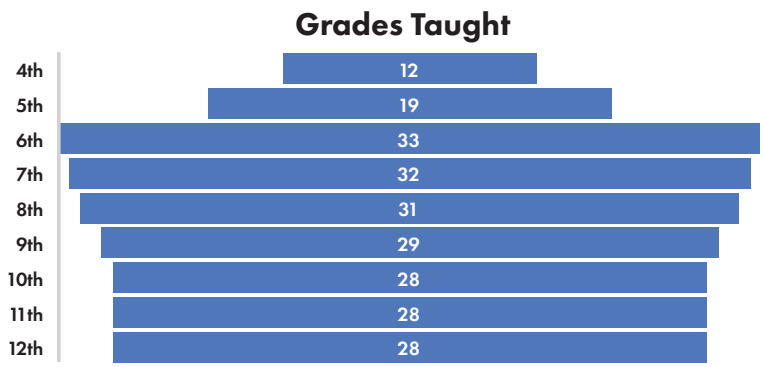
AZ: 2	HI: 1	MD: 1	NM: 1	TX: 6
CA: 3	IL: 7	MI: 2	NY: 2	VA: 1
CO: 3	IN: 1	MN: 9	OH: 1	WA: 1
FL: 1	KS: 1	NE: 1	PA: 3	WI: 2
GA: 2	KY: 1	NJ: 1	TN: 2	

Note:

- *24 of 50 states were represented, with the most representation from Minnesota, Illinois, and Texas.*

Q2.

What grades did/do you teach primarily? (check all that apply)



Notes:

- *11 band directors have taught at least 6th–12th grades at some point, if not more grades.*
- *There is no real differentiating data for this question—only three people answered that they only teach 4th and 5th, but the most common answer was "6th, 7th, and 8th," probably because so many people doubled up here, but it wasn't significant enough to make a difference.*

Q3.

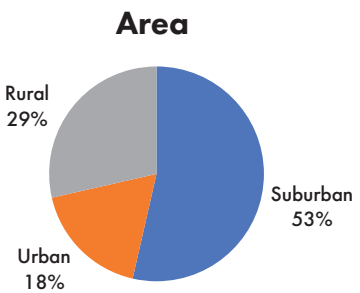
How many years have you been teaching (or did you teach) band?

- *Out of 56 answers, the average time anyone taught band was 13 years.*
- *13 people said they had been teaching for 20 years or more.*

Q4.

How would you classify the area you teach in?

- Suburban. 30
- Rural 16
- Urban. 10



Q5.

How many total bassoons (instruments) does your school own? (Functional or not; If you no longer teach band, give the number of instruments you had on average.)

- Total bassoons reported by participants: 166 bassoons

Notes:

- *With 56 schools represented, this averages to about 3 bassoons per school.*
- *However, there were 13 schools with 0 bassoons.*
- *The number of bassoons was somewhat random when compared to school environment, band director experience, or state. There appears to be no direct connection.*

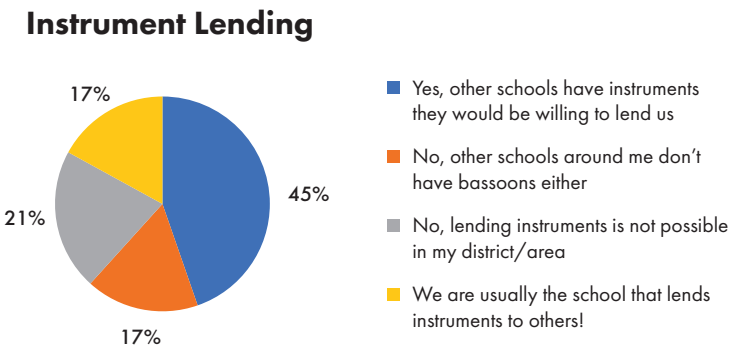
Comparing question 4 with 5:

- *Suburban schools had an average of 3.5 bassoons per school*
  - *8 out of 30 suburban schools (26%) had 0 bassoons*
- *Rural schools had an average of 2.75 bassoons per school*
  - *5 out of 16 rural schools (31%) had 0 bassoons*
- *Urban schools had an average of 3.5 bassoons per school*
  - *0 out of 10 urban schools (0%) had 0 bassoons*

Q6.

If your school doesn't own bassoons or doesn't have enough instruments for the amount of interested students, do you have the option of borrowing a bassoon within your district from other schools if you have an interested student?

Yes, other schools have instruments they would be willing to lend us	21
No, lending instruments is not possible in my district/area	10
No, other schools around me don't have bassoons either	8
We are usually the school that lends instruments to others!	8



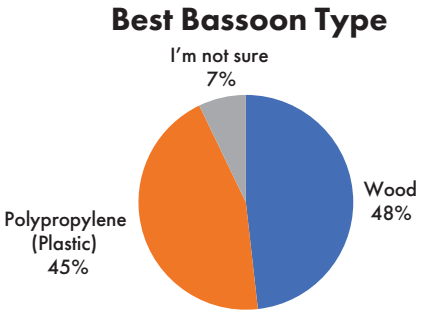
Notes:

- *9 schools did not answer. Perhaps this means they do not have the issue of not owning bassoons or having enough bassoons for interested students.*
- *Lending instruments within the district is allowed in at least 50% of schools, though not all schools have instruments to loan.*

Q7.

Think about the best bassoon your school owns that you reserve for top players because of its great sound. What kind of bassoon is it?

- Wooden 27
- Polypropylene (Plastic) 25
- I'm not sure 4
- We don't own any bassoons but if I had to choose one of these options, it would be: (choose one) Wooden, Polypropylene (Plastic), or I'm not sure.



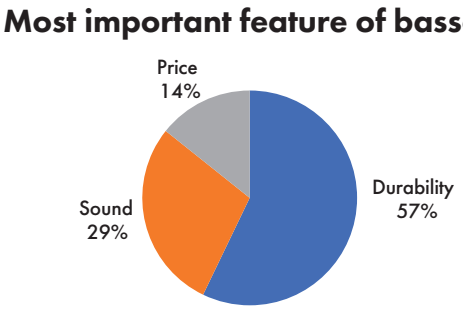
Note:

- *Responses for the option beginning with "We don't own any bassoons but…" were tallied with the first three options.*

Q8.

If you were to buy a new bassoon for your program, what is the most important factor to you personally?

- Durability 32
- Sound 16
- Price 8



Note:

- *Durability is prized above price and sound in preference when buying an instrument.*

Back to Table of Contents

Q9.

How many bassoonists (people) have you had in your program, on average per year, in the last 5 years? (If you've been teaching less than 5 years, give me the average anyway. If you're retired, summarize your last 5 years of teaching)

The average of responses to this question was 2 students per program in the last 5 years.

Q10.

How many TOTAL students per year, on average has your band program had in the last 5 years? (This is to measure the proportion of bassoon students to total students)

On average, teachers had about 1 bassoon player per 75 students in their program.

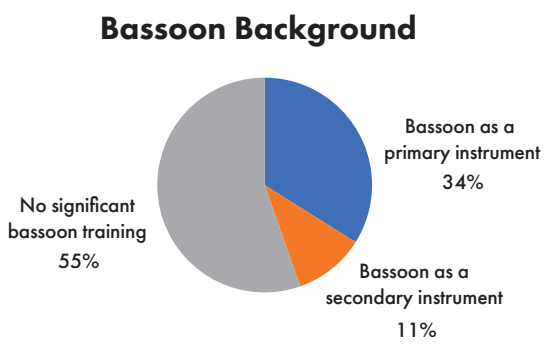
Note:

- *It appears that this question was often misunderstood. Many answers were 1 or 2, instead of the anticipated average of about 300. The average stated above was taken from about 20 legitimate numbers.*

Q11.

Which of the following describes your experience with the bassoon?

- I tinkered with bassoon in techniques classes or in masterclasses but never pursued it 31
- Bassoon was/is my primary instrument, and I consider myself a bassoon specialist 19
- Bassoon was/is my secondary instrument or a regular double 6



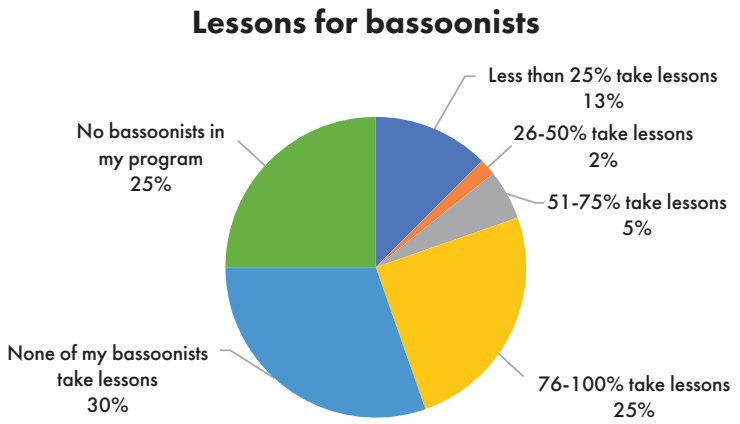
Note:

- *This data pool is too small to believably indicate that a significant proportion of band directors are also bassoonists.*

Q12.

Approximately what percentage of your bassoonists take private lessons with a bassoon specialist consistently each year?

- I have at least one bassoonist in my program, but they do not take private lessons with a specialist 17
- I don't have bassoonists in my program 14
- 76-100%. 14
- Less than 25%. 7
- 51-75% 3
- 26-50%. 1



Notes:

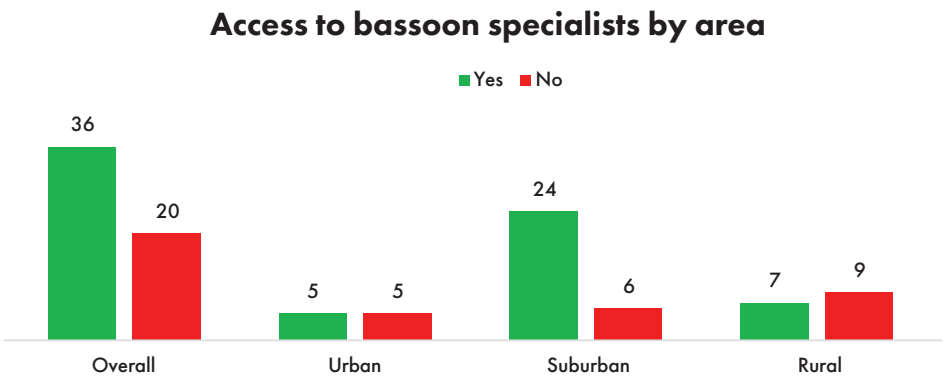
- *25 programs have bassoonists who take lessons.*
- *25% of programs do not have bassoonists.*
- *17 programs have at least 1 bassoon, but that student doesn't take lessons.*
- *Counting only those programs with bassoonists, 60% of school bassoonists take private lessons.*
- *The most popular answers were having bassoonists and not taking private lessons (30%), then "76-100%" (25%)*
- *This data pool is not large enough to properly assess the country's level of access to lessons.*

Back to Table of Contents

Q13.

Do you have access to a bassoon specialist other than yourself in your area, should you need one? (a "bassoon specialist" should be defined as: a person who is primarily a bassoonist or for whom bassoon is a strong secondary instrument, who has many years of experience in playing and teaching the bassoon.)

- Yes – 36 (64%)
  - 24 Suburban 67%
  - 7 rural 20%
  - 5 urban 14%
- No – 20 (36%)
  - 6 Suburban 30%
  - 9 Rural 45%
  - 5 urban 25%

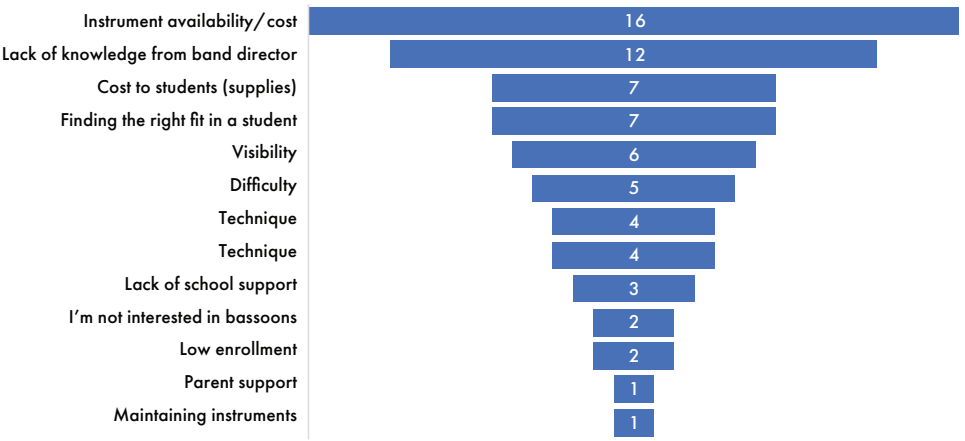


Notes:

- *36% of programs do not have a bassoon specialist in the area other than the band director, if applicable.*
- *Of the programs that HAVE access to other bassoon specialists, 67% were classified as suburban. The lowest access to other bassoon specialists was in urban schools at 14%.*
- *This data pool is not large enough to support an accurate representation of level of access throughout the country, though overall results are consistent with responses provided in the Bassoon Origins Survey.*

Q14.

What is the most difficult barrier to overcome when trying to recruit and retain bassoonists in your program?

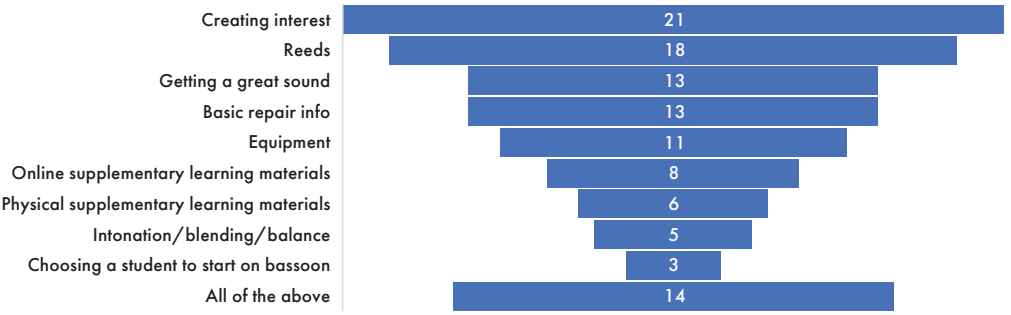


Notes:

- *The two most common answers were "Instrument availability/cost" and "Lack of knowledge from band director."*

Q15.

Which of the following would you be most interested in learning about in order to help further the success of bassoonists (or potential bassoonists) in your program? (choose all that apply)



Back to Table of Contents

Q16.

Tell me a story about a student you have started on the bassoon and how you did so, if applicable.

Out of 56 surveys, 32 participants submitted responses to this question. Many answers use the terms "switched" or "started" in their stories; for example, "I switched a clarinetist to the bassoon once," or "I typically try to start one bassoon a year." The use of the term may imply an introduction to the bassoon, giving instruction on the bassoon, or both, but it is unclear which of these is true without further inquiry. Of the 32 participants who provided stories, 23 specifically mentioned introducing the bassoon to a student, and 12 specifically mentioned personally teaching the bassoon to a student without the inclusion of a specialist private teacher. In the next section, I present a number of responses band directors provided to question 16 of the survey.

Band directors' "starting a student" stories

Band directors are often a major influence on their students and are vital to the beginning, switching, and ultimate success of bassoonists. Many of them shared a unique story of starting or switching a bassoonist in the survey, usually involving a student who was motivated to learn the instrument either before they started band or once they learned about the instrument from their band director. These stories are vital to helping us as bassoon teachers move forward in nurturing bassoonists who start in band programs. They can also supply band directors with new ways of encouraging more new bassoonists. Below are some of those stories. Responses have not been edited for grammar or spelling.

> I had specialists that would come in to do a short presentation on oboe, bassoon, horn and tuba. I would propose the idea of switching to students who were doing exceptionally well on flute or clarinet and invite them to meet with the oboist or bassoon specialist that I brought in for an introductory lesson. I would write a personal email to the parents before the introductory lesson. It was a very individualized, successful process. Most of those students continued into high school and college.

> I had a student who wanted to play bassoon but had no way to obtain an instrument. As part of a community band, I asked if the student could use the one I borrow from them to learn on. They gave me permission. I taught him to play.

> I usually wait until the student has played another woodwind instrument successfully for a year. I have had way better success in this model.

> I switched a bass clarinetist to bassoon. He has high musical aptitude, is a leader in the classroom, and always works hard. This student is proud to play the bassoon and enjoys it much more than bass clarinet. I have bought most of his supplies out of my own pocket. I went to one masterclass about starting bassoons at my state music conference before switching him, and I was the example student. I struggle with helping him with

technique and changing fingerings quickly but have successfully taught him to produce quality tone and play in tune.

Analysis of survey results

Both the Bassoon Origins Survey (published in *The Double Reed*, 47/3) and the Band Director Survey presented here were designed using my personal experience as a teacher and student, as well as having personal and professional relationships with band directors and other bassoonists. Collecting this information helped me identify trends that may or may not have been anticipated. Comparing information from both the teacher and student perspectives of beginning bassoon provides a fuller picture of the experience and allows us to apply what we have learned to the research in secondary materials that I presented in the first article in this series (*The Double Reed*, 47/2). In this section, I will connect data from those surveys to point out trends in when, how, and why bassoonists come to learn their instrument and also to highlight common barriers or gaps in access for bassoonists and band directors alike.

The Bassoon Origins survey presents us with a few clear trends that represent the majority of bassoonists and their stories. From Question 3, one third of bassoonists start taking lessons immediately after acquiring the instrument, while the other two thirds of bassoonists learn the instrument on their own for a time. As a private teacher, I frequently encounter bassoonists who have successfully learned the bassoon on their own to an intermediate level, but after about a year of learning, they hit a wall and can't figure out how to continue growing as a bassoonist. Every one of these students has different self-taught habits, a slightly different set of incorrect fingerings, and little to no knowledge of where to find good reeds. This concept of a "wall" in learning may be pointed to by the most popular answer to "When did you start taking lessons?": 39% of bassoonists took lessons at least one year or more after acquiring the instrument.

It is also important to note how many bassoonists claimed that they were "self-taught" or "started on their own." Not all of these claims were specifically noted as positive or negative experiences. While some bassoonists feel held back by the fact that they didn't have access to a teacher in the beginning, others feel that it was a good challenge for them. Many of the stories provided by band directors mention students being "self-directed" or "a leader," which leads them to being more successful on the instrument, but in those stories there is no mention of struggle on the student's part after the initial switching period. This missing data could be due to the fact that those who struggled quit playing and therefore did not take the survey.

The question of lessons in the Bassoon Origins Survey (Q3) shows that 91% of bassoon students successfully take private lessons for at least three months at some point. In the Band Director Survey (Q12), counting only the answers from band directors who reported having at least one bassoonist in their program, 40% of programs reported that their students don't take lessons at all. Another 40% of programs reported that more than half of their bassoonists take lessons, while the remaining 20% reported less than half of their bassoonists take lessons. By combining these results, it appears that an average of 75% of bassoonists seek private lessons, showing their determination to learn more about the instrument, and to seek community in the world of bassoon.Thus the continuing need for great private bassoon teachers.

The term "access to a bassoon specialist" is a very broad statement. Though bassoon professionals may be accessible in certain areas, it does not mean that schools or students have the means to afford them, that they are a perfect fit for every student, or that they are fine teachers. Assessing issues of access in general starts with a basic survey of availability. The Bassoon Origins Survey (Q2) and the Band Director survey (Q13) showed consistent data regarding general access to bassoon specialists in any given area. Sixty-four percent of band directors reported that their programs have access to a bassoon specialist other than themselves, while 63% of bassoonists reported having access to a bassoon teacher other than their band director when they started playing the bassoon.

Results of the surveys are also consistent in identifying levels of access by location. Both the Bassoon Origins and Band Director surveys show that suburban environments have the highest access to bassoon specialists compared to rural and urban environments. Of the results that confirmed access to a bassoon teacher in their area, 68% of bassoonists (Bassoon Origins Q1) and 67% of band directors (Band Director Q4) were from suburban areas. The lowest level of access was consistently in rural environments. Of the results that reported no access to a bassoon teacher in their area, 50% of bassoonists and 45% of band directors were from rural areas. The levels of access to bassoon specialists shown in these surveys are consistent with findings in studies of general instrumental education programs and their issues of access based on location.

The Bassoon Origin survey shows significant trends when it comes to how bassoonists get started on the instrument. In question Q4 ("What instrument was the first one you ever learned?"), it is important to note that the responses do not represent all bassoonists who start playing in United States public schools. Instead, it represents those who stuck with the instrument for a significant amount of time. The results of the survey could be interpreted to show the most effective course of study for creating *lifelong* bassoonists. Ninety-three percent of bassoonists who still play today started on a different instrument, which indicates some musical background and knowledge of how to read music before starting the instrument. The survey shows a wide range of starting instruments in general, but the most commonly effective foundations for bassoonists are clearly clarinet (28%) and piano, organ, or keyboard (27%).

The most popular reason for choosing the bassoon was "Band Director Suggestion" at 39%, with the second most popular reason being "Sound" at 23%. The prevalence of people selecting the answer "Sound" (which included the description, "you saw a demonstration, watched a video, or heard a soloist play") points to the efficacy of (and need for) demonstrations by bassoon experts in schools, as well as the benefits of increasing visibility of the instrument through educational opportunities, chamber or solo recitals, and soloist features in classical concerts. There is a fair number of videos online intended to introduce students to the bassoon, but to highlight a point made in a few comments in the Band Director Survey, general visibility of the instrument in mainstream media and even large professional music organizations is low compared to other instruments like the violin, piano, or clarinet.

Generally, the argument for holding the bassoon back from younger students is one of physical size to be able to reach the holes of the instrument, but there were very few physical issues mentioned in bassoonists' stories related to starting on the instrument, showing that some band directors are already doing a great job of encouraging the instrument at the

right time in a student's musical journey. The most common starting age for bassoonists is 7th grade—26% of bassoonists start or switch to bassoon at that age (Bassoon Origins Q7). There is a significant concentration of beginning bassoonists between 6th and 10th grade—a total of 74% of students begin the bassoon in this range of ages, probably because most band programs begin in 5th or 6th grade, allowing the aforementioned 93% of bassoonists to start their musical education on a different instrument. This data can help band directors and bassoonists begin to target specific age groups, specifically 7th and 9th grades, in order to cultivate more lifelong bassoonists.

To further understand a practical target for recruitment, Questions 6 and 7 of the Band Director Survey imply that band directors recruit an average of 2 bassoon students per year, with an average ratio of one bassoonist per every 75 students in band. These numbers of course would be variable based on enrollment, need, interest, and availability of instruments, but it provides a practical expectation for band directors aspiring to have a realistic goal in recruiting and retaining bassoonists in their program.

When I wrote the Bassoon Origins Survey, I was interested in finding trends in how quickly bassoonists start playing in an ensemble after they start learning the instrument (Q6), as well as if they continued playing a secondary instrument (Q9), either by choice or by program requirement (for example, through marching or pep band). My expectation was that starting in an ensemble too quickly would cause bassoonists to become discouraged, or that a requirement to continue with a secondary instrument would hinder progress on the bassoon. Keeping in mind that the Bassoon Origins Survey was taken by bassoonists who still play today, it is obvious to me that the results of the survey, combined with the written comments from Questions 10 and 11 suggest that these two factors did not hold bassoonists back from continuing to learn the instrument, but instead fueled their interest. Eighty percent of bassoonists recall starting to play the bassoon in an ensemble within three months of acquiring an instrument, with 56% beginning to play bassoon in an ensemble within less than a month. Only a few comments in origin stories mentioned feeling held back by starting the instrument later than their peers. It would have been an interesting addition to the survey to see how many bassoonists had that feeling.

The most common questions I get as a bassoon specialist from band directors and bassoonists alike are issues related to technique or reeds. Question 8 of the Bassoon Origins Survey ("Which of the following techniques have you struggled with the most throughout your time as a bassoonist?") relates directly to Band Director Survey Question 15 ("Which of the following would you be most interested in learning about in order to help further the success of bassoonists in your program?"). The top three answers to the former were "Articulation/Double Tonguing (26%)," "Reed Issues (25%)," and "Intonation/Stability (17%)." The three most popular answers to the latter were "Creating Interest," "Reeds in general," and "Getting a great sound." These closely related answers suggest that both technique and reeds should be a focus for both young bassoonists and band directors when helping them solve problems and when we create new content for them to learn more about the bassoon. I was surprised to find that fingerings, which are commonly a difficulty for band directors to understand and coach, were never mentioned as a point of difficulty for band directors, and they ranked fourth on the list of techniques with which bassoonists struggle.

Both surveys included an open-ended question related to barriers or challenges encountered when pursuing the teaching or learning of the bassoon. In my experience, the biggest barrier perceived by both bassoonists and band directors always comes down to funding. Sure enough, both surveys reflected the most common challenge being cost. From the data, we can assume that an average of 45% of band directors and bassoonists consider cost to be their greatest barrier to pursuing or acquiring a bassoon. Reeds were the second most commonly mentioned challenge for both bassoonists and band directors.

A common answer from Question 14 of the Band Director Survey on barriers to recruiting and retaining students was "Lack of knowledge from band director." The prevalence of this answer lines up with previous research on the need for more focus on woodwinds, specifically bassoon, in pre-service techniques classes for music educators.

The barrier of cost for band directors relates directly to the availability of instruments at their schools. Questions 2 through 5 of the Band Director Survey assess each program's availability of instruments as well as what aspects of bassoons are most important to band directors in the pursuit of purchasing instruments for their program. Question 2 asked about the number of instruments owned by schools. Though numbers of bassoons owned varied greatly between participants, an average of 3.5 bassoons are owned by suburban and urban schools, while rural schools enjoyed a smaller average of 2.75 bassoons per school. The numbers provided in this question imply that access issues regarding affording instruments don't necessarily discriminate based on location. Every district and every school has a different budget regardless of location. A perfect example is that we find the highest level of access to teachers and the highest number of bassoons owned in suburban areas, and at the same time there were also eight schools reporting that they own no bassoons at all.

When trying to find immediate solutions for the problem of not having enough instruments, I asked in Question 6 if borrowing instruments was a possibility. 45% reported that borrowing bassoons would be a possibility, while 21% said lending is not possible, and 17% said that no one in their area had any bassoons to lend them regardless of the possibility to do so. It was refreshing to see that 17% of participants are already lending instruments to other schools and trying to solve the barrier of access.

When asked what type of bassoon gets the best sound (Band Director Q7), the results were almost equally split between wooden and polypropylene (plastic) bassoons. When asked in Question 8 which factor was most important to each band director when choosing a bassoon to buy, 57% responded that "Durability" was the most important, 29% answered "Sound," and 14% answered "Price." These results suggest that band directors are looking for instruments that will last a long time first and foremost, which is understandable since good bassoons are not cheap. Also keeping in mind that cost was a concern to most participants, it is surprising to note that price was the least popular focus when acquiring a new instrument.

One surprise in the open-ended answers of the Bassoon Origins Survey was the number of bassoonists who took private bassoon lessons from someone who was not a bassoon specialist. While online lessons may now be able to introduce more beginning players to bassoon-specific teachers, the ideal would be to have more bassoon specialists available to teach in more areas.

Another surprising answer from the open-ended answers of both surveys was just how many band directors give their money and/or personal time to help their students learn. It is

important to understand how much support some band directors provide just to help their students pursue an interest. While discounts on reeds and lessons can be seen as giving a service away for free, perhaps private teachers, reed makers, and other vendors who are in a position to do so can also view such discounts as an investment in a musician's future, taking a page from the band directors who work so hard to help their students realize their dreams, sometimes at a personal cost. Based on anecdotal evidence, I would guess that many of us are already doing this.

Conclusion

In my time as a private bassoon teacher I've taught many bassoonists, but I'm sure there are a number of students in my community I've never had a chance to meet, simply because of the barriers keeping them from the services I provide. I created these surveys, in part, to tell me what I might be missing. Three specific barriers stand out to me after comparing the research with the surveys. First, the issue of equity keeps rural schools from reaching the level of assistance they need to nurture bassoonists. Second, there is significant room for improvement when it comes to bassoon education materials for both band directors and bassoonists. Third, the issue of finances keeps band programs and musicians of all ages from feeling comfortable starting or pursuing the bassoon. In this section, I will discuss how these barriers are represented in both my research and the surveys, how they relate to my personal experience, and how we as bassoonists can start to remove these barriers to make the bassoon accessible to more students.

Rural communities have the biggest challenge when it comes to equity and access. They do not have the same level of access to in-person bassoon teachers or performers as suburban or urban communities do, nor do they have the same level of finances allocated to the arts in schools. Performers and teachers are models of the instrument, and though online resources are a wonderful way to spread knowledge and inspiration, seeing videos of a performer online simply isn't the same as witnessing a performance in person.

I have taught in rural communities through long commutes from suburban areas, and from personal experience I know it is extremely difficult to establish a presence in an area where you do not live. While there are barriers in front of band programs and students, there are also barriers in front of professional commuting bassoonists trying to make a living. I have been told multiple times that the hourly rates for other private teachers were much lower compared to mine, yet no mileage compensation is provided for long drives unless your trip is combined with a college-funded visit or a performance with an orchestra. In some regions, there is still only a small chance that any given school will even have a working bassoon readily available for a student—a student who may not stick with the instrument without a consistent connection to a teacher. This makes it difficult to make such travel economically viable.

All of this leads back to the thought that perhaps our constantly evolving online capabilities can help alleviate that stress. However, even if I was able to set up an online lesson with a rural student, their internet connection often wouldn't be strong enough to sustain a Zoom call without pausing every few minutes. It is therefore essential that we do not wait for internet connections to magically improve, but instead start creating online and print

resources that do not require a strong internet connection. Band directors Chandran Daniel and Stan Johnson's stories (from the first article in this series) on fostering a strong community connection in order to create a thriving music community in rural schools should prompt us to remember that even if we can't be there in person, we can create new, more detailed resources that help band directors guide their students to success without a direct connection to a bassoon specialist. After all, many of the responses in the comments of my surveys mentioned students learning on their own, and Dr. Shannon Lowe's 2022 study shows that only 17.7% of rural band directors reported students taking lessons with a private teacher. We can support students who learn on their own with materials that show the student how to problem solve, so they can teach themselves more effectively.

Band directors' largest barrier to the bassoon is knowledge. They often face a lack of time to learn the bassoon in techniques classes and are often concerned with their budget when it comes to purchasing and maintaining bassoons, both of which do not foster a high level of positive connection to the bassoon. There is room for improvement in creating resources for band directors to continue learning about the bassoon after their bachelor's degree is finished. If the general instrumental education research shows us that woodwinds are more difficult to effectively teach than any other instrument, and that there is no way to regulate music education techniques classes to allow students more time to learn the woodwinds, we must create resources for band directors as supplemental information.

In Texas, double reed specialty store Bocal Majority has for many years run a "Band Director Boot Camp," a three-day workshop where band directors are invited to learn more about the bassoon and/or oboe and how to teach their students more effectively. These workshops are held in three locations around the state and have high enrollment rates. Lowe's survey showed that 85.2% of band directors are, to varying degrees, interested in this kind of educational opportunity. Bocal Majority has started a trend in music educator post-degree bassoon education that should be echoed around the country. Band directors are the number one reason the bassoon gets any attention in their classrooms. If we create interest to learn more—and provide support where needed—we can surely boost the student bassoon population by helping their band directors.

Regardless of age, location, or employment, the biggest barrier to the bassoon for all bassoonists and band directors is finances. Predictably, this is the most difficult barrier to overcome. In my experience, the cost of reeds and instruments usually has a lot to do with quality, which is directly connected to band directors not being able to find a good instrument for the best price from a trusted source. The best way forward that I can see is to seek better funding for school band programs, which in turn can support their students. Trying to find a way to increase a school's financial support for bassoonists brings me back to band director Chandran Daniel's feature in *Teaching Music* and Elpus and Abril's suggestions to help band programs financially: to fundraise directly for the program with the help of grants, donors, and corporate sponsors. Abril and Bannerman even suggest rallying for more funding by putting on district-wide events to show how music impacts the surrounding community in a positive way. A motivated and unified school music department can make a huge difference in addressing its financial needs, and in turn those of its bassoonists. It is also important for local professional and avocational bassoonists to rally around our local

band and orchestra directors to create solutions that help everyone financially and create sustainable environments in which young bassoon students can thrive.

Call for further research

Though issues of access are widely understood in the bassoon community, there is a stark lack of research on how to go about understanding, teaching about, and beginning to help lift the shroud of mystery (and perhaps negativity) surrounding learning the bassoon. There is also a lack of research (though no lack of opinion) on teaching beginning bassoonists and what is most effective from the perspective of private teachers and/or band directors. If creating interest is one of the biggest issues band directors face as concerns the bassoon, it is implied that bassoonists and band directors haven't done a great job of creating a positive environment or a high level of visibility for students to become interested in the instrument in the first place. While we do need to keep our expectations realistic regarding the very real costs of the instrument as well as the perceived difficulty of bassoon technique compared to other band instruments, we also need to find a way forward in creating wider, more inclusive access. Further research is needed to find trends in how students are able to afford instruments and where there might be funding available to help students and teachers in need. While professional bassoon teachers need to make a living, it is unacceptable to simply turn away students because they cannot afford lessons, reeds, or instruments. A wider pool of survey participants (or a more concentrated area of participants) could greatly increase the efficiency of this research, pointing to needs in specific areas to which I may not have been able to call attention.

Call for action

Though small, the bassoon community is strong, unique, and welcoming. Let's continue to offer help in any form to students, band directors, and amateur adult musicians alike, welcoming them to the expansive and fascinating world of the bassoon. Let's create new resources to bring more students to the instrument and help band directors recruit, retain, and nurture their bassoon students. Let's make it possible for the less fortunate in our community to obtain equal opportunity to learn the bassoon, regardless of personal finances or distance from an in-person teacher. We as professional bassoonists have the means of making this happen if we come together; let's make a joyful honky noise and create a solid foundation in bassoon education for future bassoonists to carry on our legacy, no matter where they start.

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