

Breaking Barriers for American Band Directors and Bassoonists

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Ariel Detwiler

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Committee Members:

Adviser: Immanuel Davis
Co-Adviser: Dr. Keitha Lucas Hamann
Norbert Nielubowski
Dr. Emily Threinen
Dr. Peter Mercer-Taylor

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Abstract

Historically, the teaching of bassoon has presented many barriers to band directors and to music students of all ages across the nation. These barriers include personal and school finances, distance to in-person private lessons, access to good learning materials, and the general lack of band directors' knowledge of and comfort with teaching the bassoon. All these things create problems when recruiting, retaining, and nurturing new and continuing bassoonists.

Research discovered thus far has only presented one document specific to the bassoon, in Shannon Lowe's 2022 survey, "The State of the Bassoon in Music Programs across the U.S." Due to the lack of readily available research on bassoon education, other studies are used in this document to identify general instrumental education trends in many areas, which are interpreted by the author to offer an explanation for the aforementioned barriers around the bassoon. In the pursuit of finding the origins of these barriers, I conduct two surveys: a "Bassoon Origins Survey," asking 189 lifelong bassoonists for their personal experiences in how they got started on the bassoon, and a "Band Director Bassoon Survey," asking 56 elementary, middle, and high school band directors questions regarding the state of the bassoon students and the instruments in their band programs, particularly in areas of quality, access, recruitment, and retention.

Both surveys place emphasis on personal experiences and issues surrounding learning or teaching the bassoon. My findings show that though there are very few bassoonists in each program, and many programs lack bassoonists or bassoon instruments entirely, the students who do pursue the bassoon overwhelmingly tend to start on a

different instrument, almost always pursue lessons at some point, and heavily depend on others in their life for help in affording, borrowing, or finding supplies and instruments. Both surveys showed that there is a need for more learning materials, and both surveys showed that financial stress and finding good reeds are the most significant barriers in front of the bassoon. Solutions to these barriers are presented, but further remedial work is needed in this area, as well as further research on the topic of bassoon education and access.

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Introduction

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 30 people in a 90-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, all of whom didn’t know 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, research, and the fundamentals of teaching beginners.

When I surveyed the options of beginner-level bassoon books, websites with bassoon basics, and research on how to start learning to play bassoon, I was surprised to

find only one piece of published scholarly research specific to teaching beginning bassoonists (Lowe, 2022). I believe that most bassoon method books are not friendly to self-teaching or to band directors who try to help their students—both of which, I had learned from experience, were popular ways bassoonists come to the instrument in the first place. My interviews and discussions with other bassoonists and bassoon teachers revealed commonalities associated with learning the bassoon (from both the teacher and student perspectives and sometimes unflattering), but there is no research to verify these commonalities.

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. This negative stigma exists 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 promote slower growth on the instrument compared to other woodwinds, may have a direct relationship to the bassoon's reputation.

Given the low percentage of bassoonists who pursue a professional career in music, it is difficult to find a professional bassoonist within an hour's drive from a willing student, in most places across the country. This challenge of finding an available 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 to access the bassoon than any other instrument in young bands and orchestras. My goal is to find a way to create access to bassoon education for all students and band directors alike, and this document outlines strategies and shares stories that I hope will be valuable for the next generation.

Literature Review

The Knowledge Barrier - Creating a Foundation in Music Educators

Band directors¹ are the most important resource for finding potential bassoonists due to their level of personal connection with their students. Unfortunately, not all band directors have the confidence in their knowledge to teach the bassoon, and not all of them have connections with local professionals to whom they may refer their students; it is important to acknowledge that band directors themselves are not necessarily at fault for these deficits. Students who find private bassoon teachers after attempting to learn on their own with just a fingering chart and a book designed for full band use have already learned the bassoon incorrectly in many ways, which sets them back when they need to relearn even the most basic concepts. What, or who, is to blame for this? Certainly not the student or the band director—perhaps the resource provided is the culprit? 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, it is nearly impossible to gain the experience necessary to teach every woodwind in the time allowed for the majority of woodwind techniques courses. A recent study on teaching effectiveness of secondary instruments in preservice music teachers presented a compelling argument to support this conclusion. In

¹ *Def. teachers of elementary, middle, and high school band students*

their study, Powell, Weaver, and Henson examined the difference in the teaching ability of music education students based on their primary instrument background (2018). Two sets of fundamental techniques were assessed in a 10-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. Taught by music education professors and graduate students, each instructor had more than three years of public school teaching experience.

They found that woodwinds were significantly more difficult to teach effectively by students who did not already play a woodwind instrument primarily. However, even students who played a woodwind primarily had lower average scores when teaching woodwinds effectively than they did teaching brass effectively. In addition, the difference in score average based on the student's primary instrument was significantly greater when teaching woodwinds. The graphs below show the scores of students who taught each fundamental set of techniques based on which instrument group they were teaching, and which was their primary background instrument. Each graph focuses on teaching a different set of fundamental techniques.

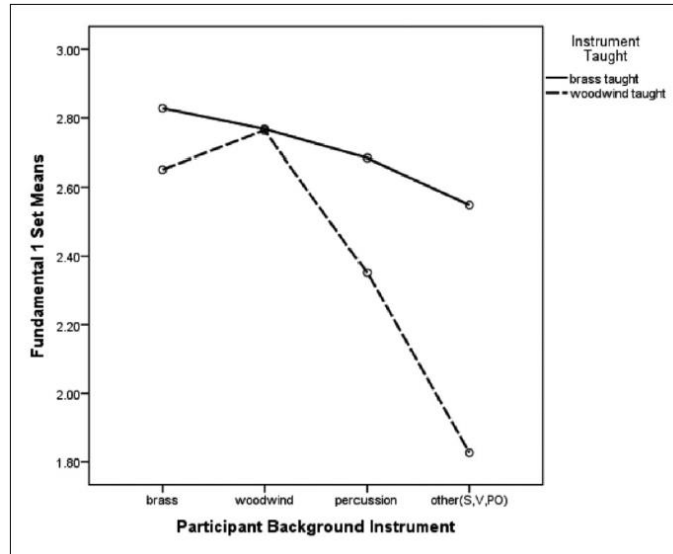


Figure 1. Interaction plot of means for participant primary instrument by instrument taught for the first set of fundamental instrument skills (instrument assembly, posture, instrument carriage, and hand position).

Figure 1

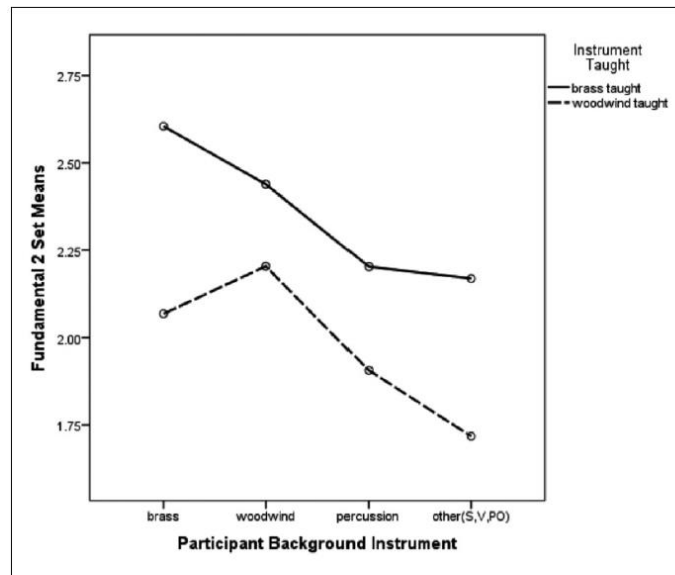


Figure 2. Interaction plot of means for participant primary instrument by instrument taught for the second set of fundamental instrument skills (breath support, embouchure, mouthpiece to mouth, and articulation).

Figure 2

Twice in their conclusion, Powell, Weaver, and Henson (2018) 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 (pp. 47).

Additionally, they suggested that the disparity acknowledged by the discovery of woodwind students teaching brass more effectively than teaching woodwinds may 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, 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” (Wagoner & Juchniewicz, 2017, pp. 56). However, there are certain schools that divide courses into specialized groups of flute, single reeds, and double reeds, and even schools who teach private lessons for the double reeds, in a semester separate from the other three woodwinds. In Greencastle, Indiana, a town of 10,000 due west of Indianapolis, lies DePauw University. For more than ten years, the Music Education program has been teaching 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 setup 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 the curriculum more successful in teaching the woodwinds, there are still educators (former students) who undervalue the experiences of the techniques classes they once took. Powell, Weaver, and Henson (2018) 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) (pp. 39).

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%, and music education faculty account for 34% of instructors. (Wagoner & Juchniewicz, 2017). Perhaps the effectiveness of courses stems from the 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 having extensive training in performance practice. No matter how many instructors of any one woodwind techniques course there may be, there will always be a varied teaching focus for the 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" (Conway, Eros, Hourigan, & Stanley, 2007, pp. 44). This goal is attainable in both categories of 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 effectively 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 a popular opinion among band directors and woodwind techniques instructors, in my experience. These barriers not only leave 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 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” (Austin, 2006, pp. 60). 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 (Austin, 2006, pp. 60).

If the curriculum of woodwind techniques 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 on the state of the bassoon in their music programs. 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, access to supplies, music, instruments, and knowledge, and she assessed these 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 (Lowe, 2022).

The solution of added bassoon education clinics for music educators after college would be beneficial in many ways. There would be more possibility to create positively charged professional relationships between bassoon teachers and band directors. It would create more revenue for bassoon teachers who often only find 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

Today's landscape of music and the arts in the United States faces more adversity than ever. Budget cuts continue to target the arts before sports or social clubs, and professional arts organizations continue to cut musicians' salaries to make ends meet. The COVID-19 pandemic shut down most live performances for a full year, causing deferments in university music programs and lowered enrollment in performance-based classes in public schools. Though it is unclear how this will impact the arts long term, musicians have adapted in many ways to keep the arts alive during a time of uncertainty.

As a professional bassoonist with local connections to the world of education, I often have similar conversations with different band directors centering on the topics of acquiring instruments and recruiting bassoonists. The most popular topics are first how to afford either a new instrument or maintaining 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 centered around levels of access to financial support which schools, teachers, and students have, as well as the problem that distance presents in the rural environment for finding a good bassoon teacher at an affordable price. I started my research trying to understand what kind of schools, students, teachers, or general areas might need the most help removing these barriers of

finance and distance, with the intention to create more opportunities for bassoon study where they are most desirable.

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 had decreased enrollment to 21% (Elpus & Abril, 2011). In a survey study of the principal's perspective 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 (SES), or the special focus of the school (Abril & Gault, 2008).

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 many ways. 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 (Abril & Bannerman, 2015). SES was also a significant factor for low participation in music ensembles in a study collecting high school music student

demographics in 2011 (Elpus & Abril, 2011). If low SES is already a deterrent 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 instrument. Records of this are scarce, but it is a well-known topic of conversation among the bassoon community. All 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. 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 goes up. The increasing number of schools, music booster clubs, and outside music organizations that provide scholarships and grant funds 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 numbers of students with low SES, at 36% (Nation's Report Card Website, 2021). 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. The only way forward is to educate and 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 stand in their way 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’” (Elpus & Abril, 2011, pp. 129). 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) (Elpus & Abril, 2011, pp.141).

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 (Elpus & Abril, 2011, pp. 141).

Another barrier with a significant effect on students’ probability to enroll in music was home life. Seventy-nine percent of students in the Abril/Elpus demographic study came from a two-parent home, while 20.6% came from a one-parent home (Elpus & Abril, 2011). 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 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” (Abril & Gault, 2008, pp. 79). 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” (pp. 70), 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 (Lowe, 2022).

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. Vincent Bates proposes that these issues are 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 (Bates, 2018, pp. 3).

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” (Bates, 2018, pp.4). 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 100 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 (Isbell, 2005). 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 being located about an hour away (Wilcox, 2005).

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” (pp. 81). 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 to 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 grants, donors, and corporate sponsors (Perry, 2018).

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 don't need high-end performance facilities or equipment to be 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 (Bates, 2018).

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 which traveled from up to 2 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, fueling 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 (Enegren, 2023).

Research on the bassoon's role in a rural environment is still lacking, but Lowe's research suggests that there may be a remedy at least for solving the knowledge deficit in rural music educators seeking to learn more. Financial barriers in front of students and teachers in a rural environment being able to afford and maintain bassoons have yet to be addressed in scholarly research. Bates' argument that low funding is not a deficit for rural communities specifically questions the need for "expensive instruments and performance venues" (Bates, 2018, pp. 6). 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. Should we be cutting off the possibilities for rural communities to reach these instruments due to their interest in other types of music, or should we be expanding their exposure to instruments that have the potential to interest certain children?

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. One may question, then, the problem of a good bassoon education if the band director does not have the means with which to teach the bassoon. 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 simply disappear with the introduction of vaccines. 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.

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 bassoon, most demographics of young bassoonists, bassoon origin stories, and general barriers faced by learning the instrument are widely known without concrete evidence to back up any of these claims. 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 these questions as common knowledge, they would likely all have different answers based on their individual lived experiences.

To better assess the issues surrounding beginning bassoonists and band directors, if they do in fact exist the way we perceive them, it is 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 United States, and one for current and former band directors teaching in the United States. Over 250 individuals completed my online surveys from more than 26 states. 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 (see Appendix A). 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,
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 the survey. Below are the survey results, along with a collection of answers directly from participants when asked to share their experiences. A full collection of these stories can be found in Appendix B.

Bassoon Origins Survey Results

The survey consisted of twelve total questions. Questions 1-9 are represented through graphs, while questions 10-11 were long answer questions, represented 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

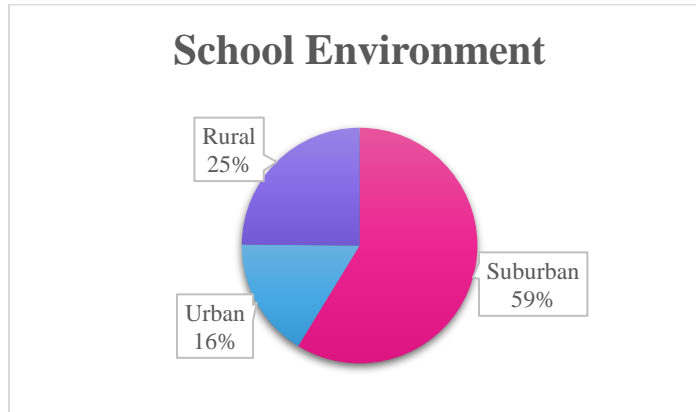


Figure 3

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

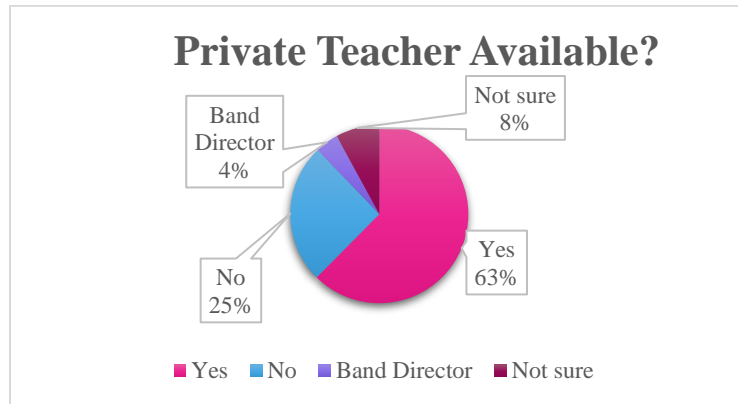


Figure 4

Notes:

- *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

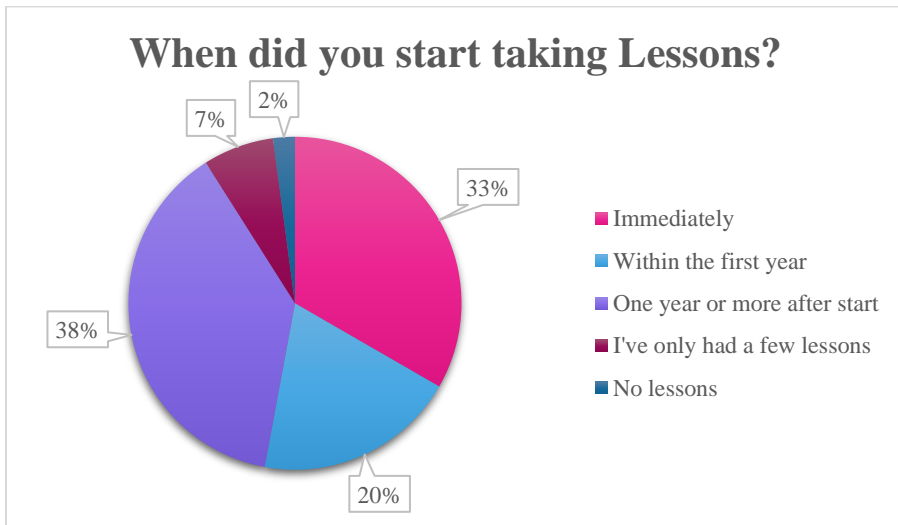


Figure 5

Notes:

- *98% of bassoonists take at least a few lessons with a teacher at some point.*
- *91% of bassoonists take lessons for at least three months at some point.*
- *The most popular trends are starting lessons right away (33%) or starting lessons more than a year after starting to play the bassoon (38%).*

Q4. What instrument was the first one you ever learned?

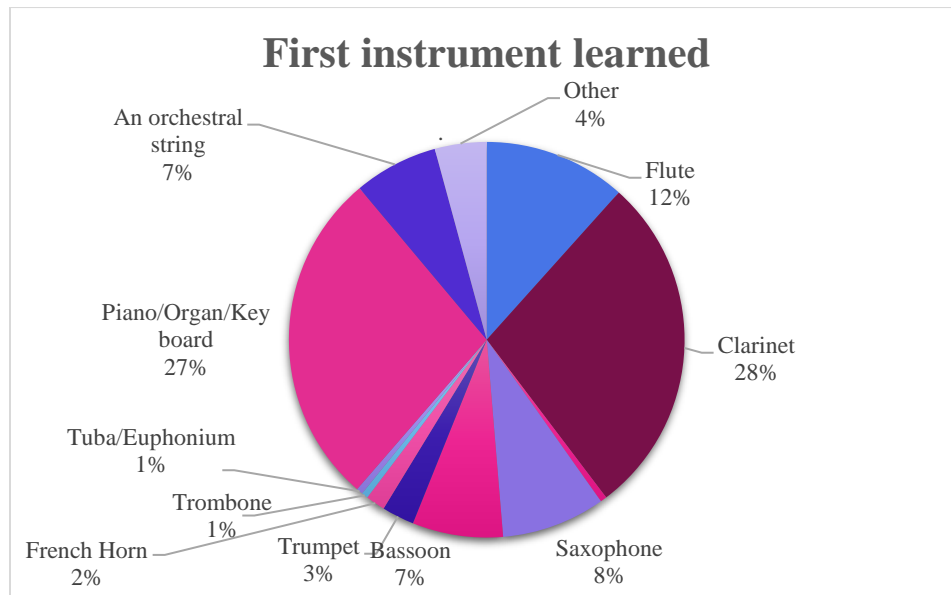


Figure 6

****includes 0% percussion, 1% Oboe, and 0% guitar/bass**

Notes:

- *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.*
- *Top answers: Clarinet (28%) and Piano/Organ/Keyboard (27%).*
- *57% of bassoonists still playing today started on a different woodwind instrument. Only 7% switched from brass, and 7% 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

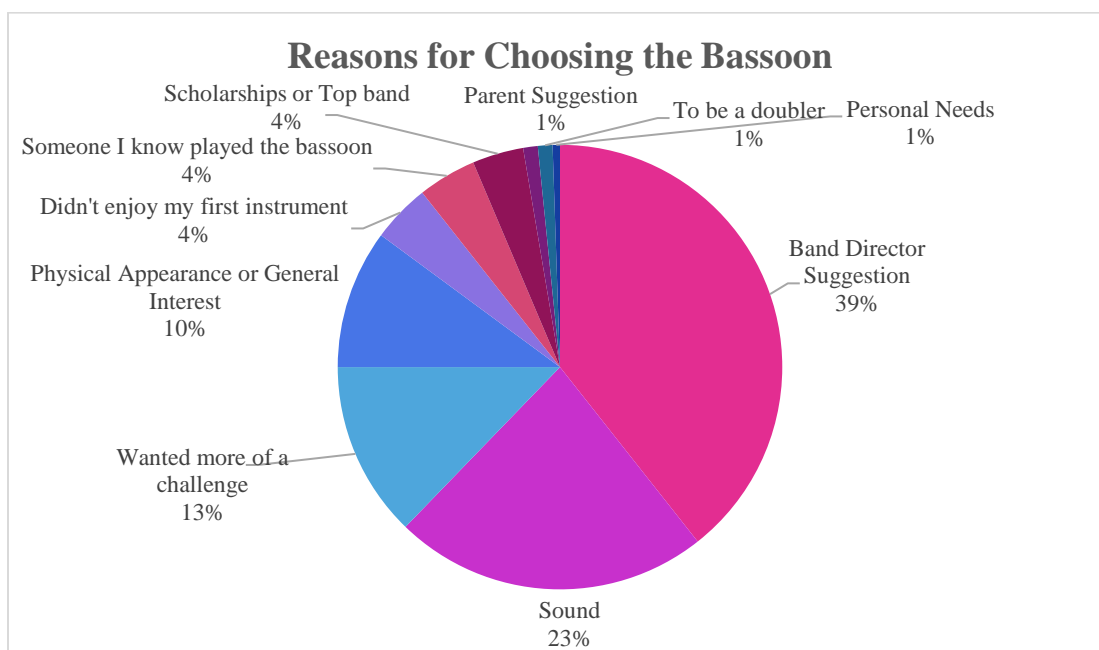


Figure 7

Notes:

- *Band Director suggestion is the #1 reason*
- *Sound is the second most popular reason to play bassoon*

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

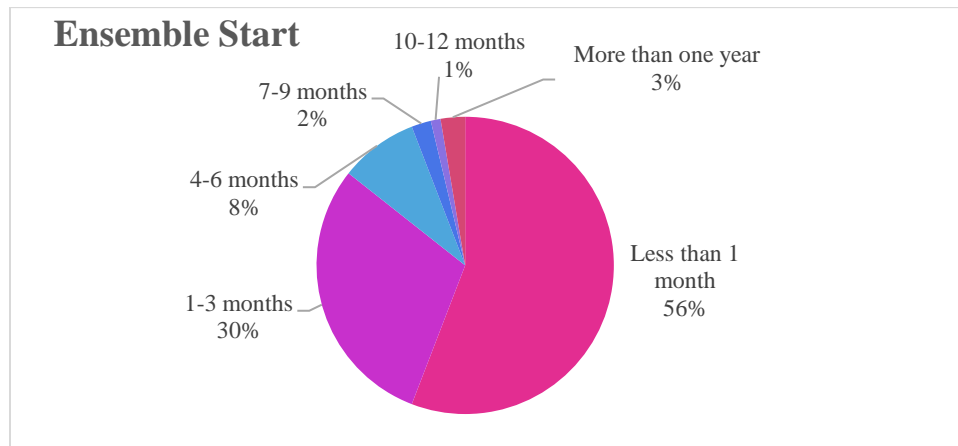


Figure 8

Notes:

- 56% of bassoonists started playing in an ensemble within one month of starting to learn the instrument.
- 87% of students who start within 3 months are in the age groups of 6th-10th grade, with significant emphasis on 7th grade.
- 86% of bassoonists begin playing in an ensemble within the first 3 months of study.

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

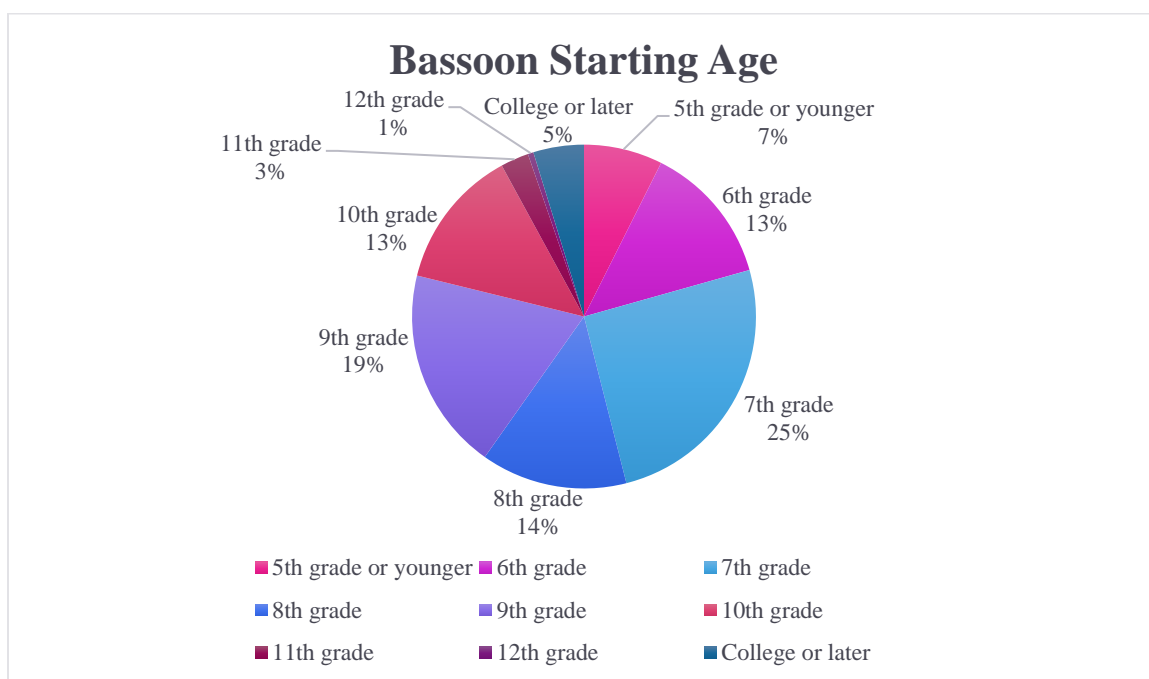


Figure 9

Notes:

- 7th grade is the most common starting age for bassoonists at 25%.
- 9th grade is the second most common starting age at 19%.
- 84% of bassoonists switch sometime between 6th and 10th grade.

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

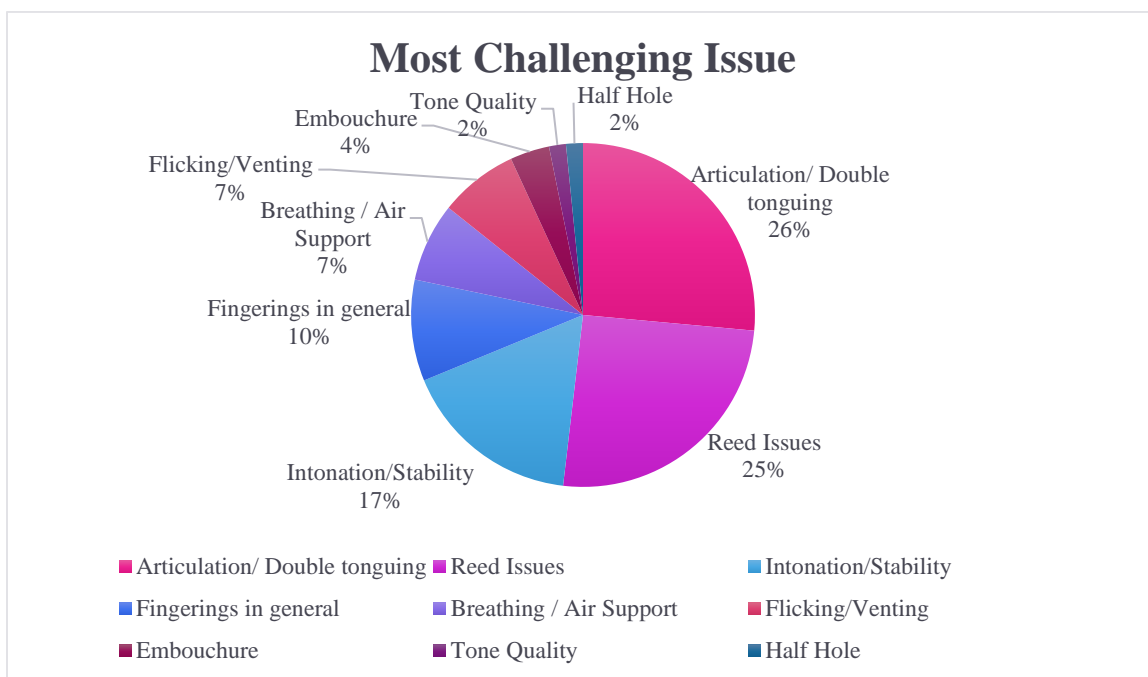


Figure 10

Notes:

- *Most popular answers are Articulation/Double Tonguing (26%) and reed issues (25%).*

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

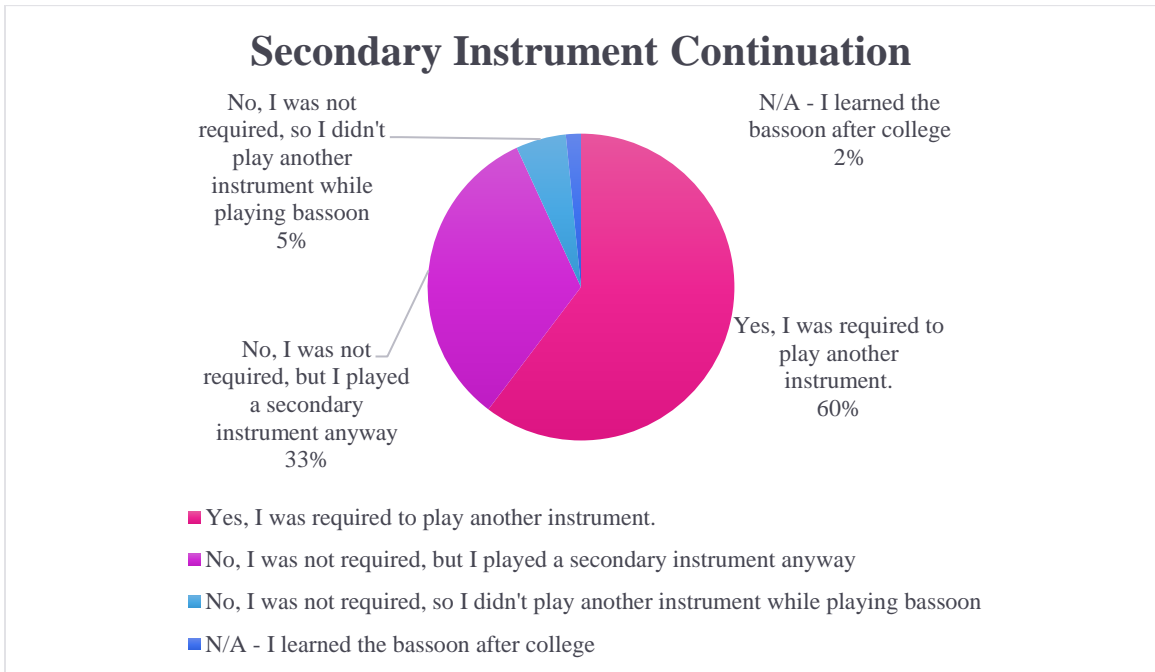


Figure 11

Notes:

- *60% of bassoonists are required to play another instrument throughout high school and college for marching or pep band.*
- *93% of bassoonists continue to play a secondary instrument whether they are required to or not.*

Bassoonists' Stories

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 93% of lifelong bassoonists 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 the answers to questions 10 and 11 of the survey in order to let bassoonists' voices be heard. Here I will present fragments of bassoonists' stories to further understand how they came to play the bassoon, followed by any barriers they faced in choosing and continuing to play the bassoon throughout their life.

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.

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

***Note: responses have not been edited for grammar or spelling.*

Band Director's Suggestion

The most popular reason for musicians playing the bassoon is receiving a band director's suggestion. Some of the most common reasons a band director's suggestion creates a shift in a student 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 switch 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. 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 [...] and I have never looked back.

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 40 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 themselves 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 doesn't 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 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 over bite, suggested I try the bassoon.

Adult Learning

Some bassoonists don't find instruction until they are 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 was my minor during doctoral studies.

Individuality

My personal switching story always includes “there were 30 flutes in a 90 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:

I got to junior high school, 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. 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 doesn’t 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 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 they were required to - - 60% of those surveyed were, after all, 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 didn't 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 has 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 didn't even 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, and often 5th graders are simply too small or lack the musical knowledge to really succeed at learning the bassoon. These barriers aren't necessarily negative, but they certainly give us perspective on why bassoonists' paths to learning the instrument are often so unique from one another.

Self-Taught Bassoonists

One very popular story heard from bassoonists includes self-teaching. Many of the stories listed here have mentioned this, and it should not be taken lightly. Self-teaching can be a good or a bad thing. In today's world of YouTube videos and educational websites, one can 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 don't 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 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, 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 some of the most important factors to consider when starting a new bassoonist.

Bassoonist Barriers

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 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's 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 great 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, which don’t 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’re given, and most times, they aren’t 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 masters to not be fighting my reed and instrument to play.

Though many may not realize it early on, bassoonists who don’t 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 here:

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 in 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 50's.

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 at 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 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 didn't 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 have 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

Readily available knowledge of the bassoon and its quirks is a huge barrier for bassoonists, no matter what their situation is. 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 practically 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.

Band Director Survey

While the Bassoon Origins survey was intended to identify trends in access issues for students, the Band Director Survey on Bassoon 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. I applied for ethics approval for this survey and received IRB approval as exempt (see Appendix A). The survey was distributed online via email and social media in April 2021, with only one qualification: the band director taking the survey must have taught in the United States in public schools at some point. Filtering out unfinished or duplicate surveys from the final data, the survey fielded responses from 56 band directors in 26 states with a wide range of experience as a band director—from 3 to 33 years—with an average of 13 years of experience. Responses were accepted regardless of possession of a bassoon at the school or having bassoon students in the 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.

After collecting and analyzing the survey results, I found that certain questions were not as relevant to my research as I expected them to be; therefore, I did not pursue full cross-analysis on all the data provided. Regardless, below are the complete survey results, along with a collection of answers directly from participants when asked to share their experiences.

Band Director Survey Results

**56 responses after filtering out incomplete or invalid responses due to qualifications.*

**participants also took the bassoon survey, saying they were bassoon specialists.*

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	

Notes:

- *24 of 50 states are represented, most repetition is Minnesota, Illinois, and Texas*

Q2. What grades did/do you teach primarily? (check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4th grade • 5th grade • 6th grade • 7th grade • 8th grade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9th grade • 10th grade • 11th grade • 12th grade |
|--|---|

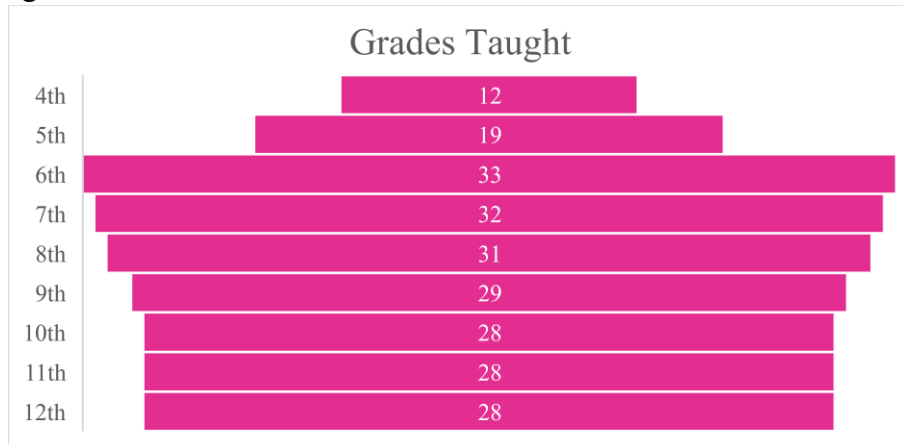


Figure 12

Notes:

- *11 band directors have taught at least 6th-12th 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

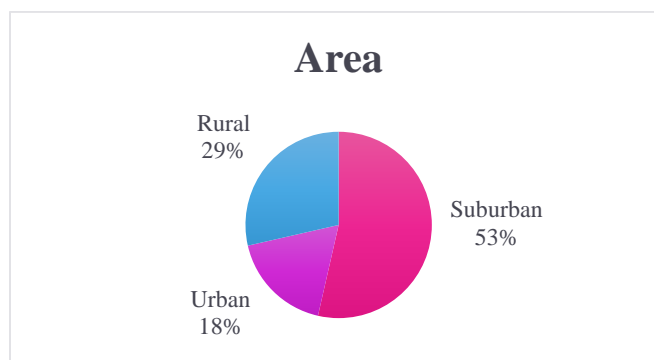


Figure 13

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.)

- 166 bassoons total, 56 schools, 3 bassoons average per school. 13 schools with 0 bassoons.

Notes:

Comparing question 4 with 5:

- *Suburban: avg. 3.5 bassoons per school (8/30 schools with 0 bassoons = 26%)*
- *Rural: avg. 2.75 bassoons per school (5/16 schools with 0 bassoons = 31%)*
- *Urban: avg. 3.5 bassoons per school (0/10 schools with 0 bassoons = 0%)*

- *Numbers of bassoons were somewhat random—there is no direct connection with school environment, band director experience, or state.*

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

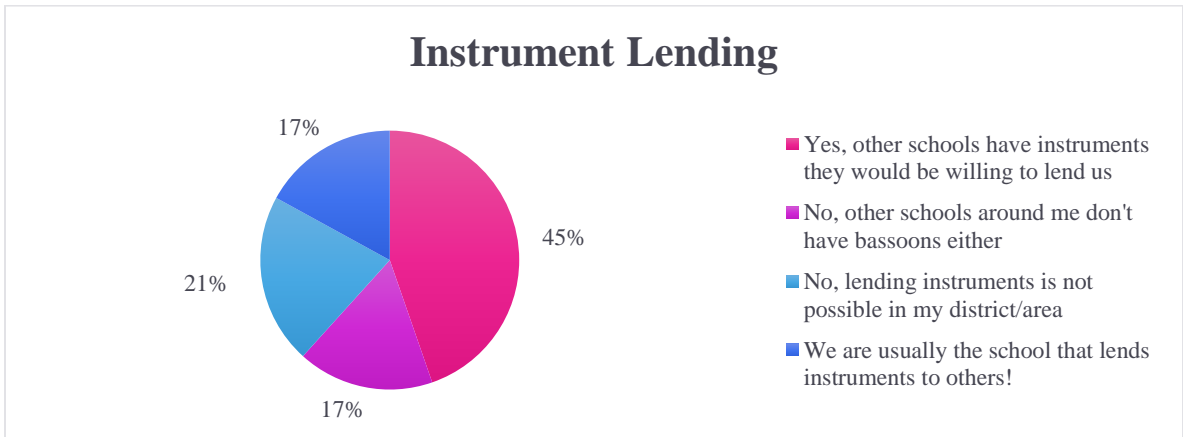


Figure 14

Notes:

- *9 Schools did not answer, perhaps this means they don't 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? (includes numbers from the answer: “We don’t own any bassoons but if I had to choose one of these options, it would be:

- Wooden – 27
- Polypropylene (Plastic) – 25
- I’m not sure – 4

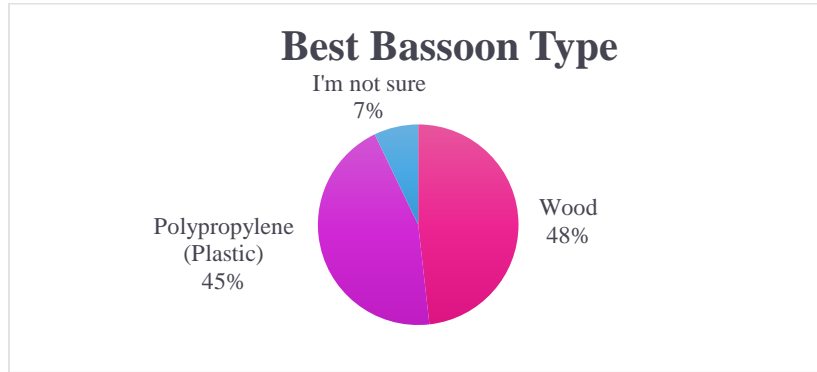


Figure 15

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

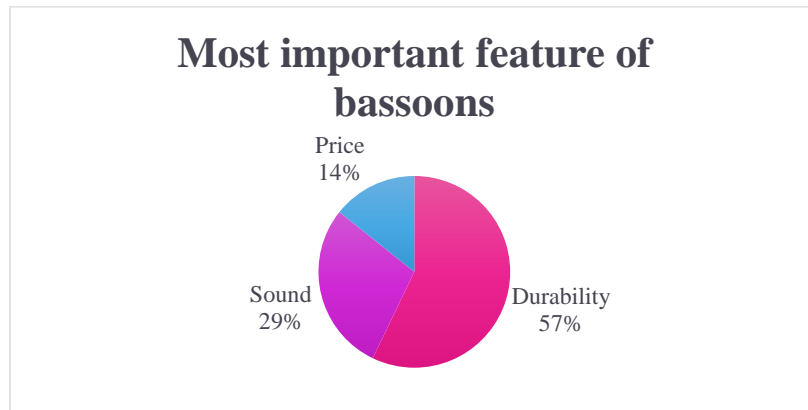


Figure 16

Notes:

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

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)

On average, 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)

**This question was most likely misunderstood. A lot of answers were 1 or 2, instead of the anticipated average of 300. I took the answers from about 20 legitimate numbers.*

On average, 1 bassoon player per 75 students in the program.

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

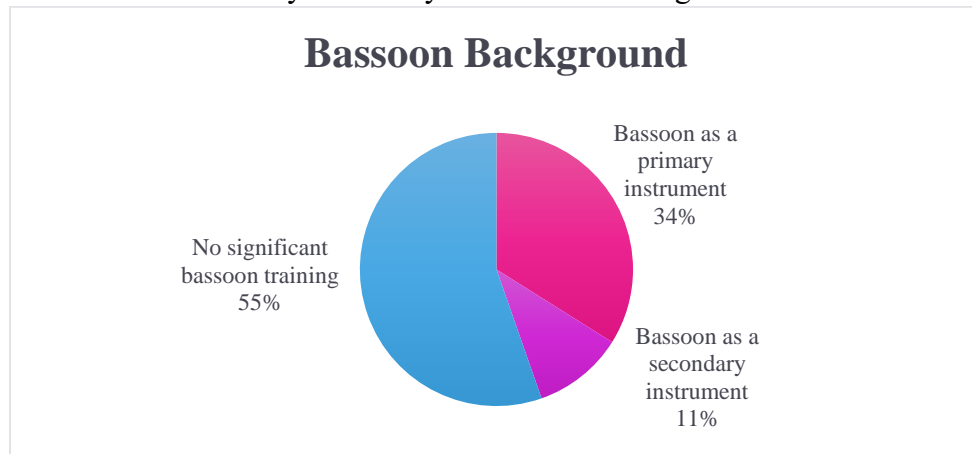


Figure 17

Notes:

- *Data pool is too small to call a significant demographic of band directors.*

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

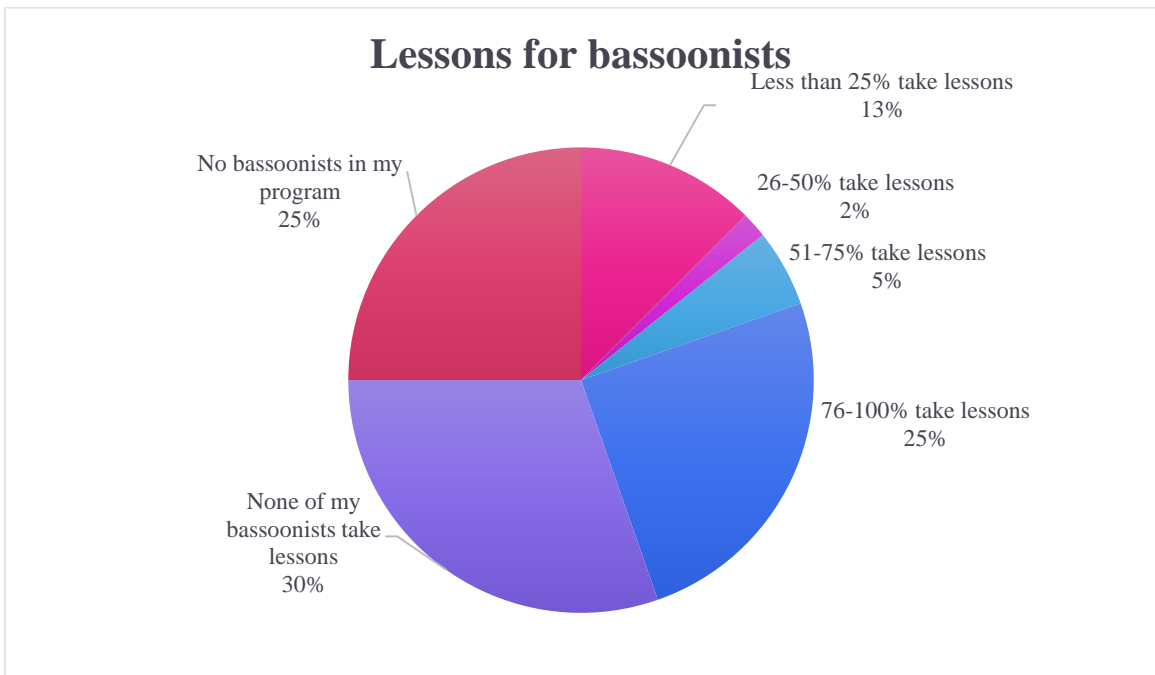


Figure 18

Notes:

- 25 programs have bassoonists who take lessons.
- 17 programs have at least 1 bassoon, but they don't take lessons.
- Counting only these programs with bassoonists, 60% of bassoonists take private lessons.
- 25% of answers do not have bassoonists in their program.
- The most popular answer was having bassoonists and not taking private lessons (30%), then "76-100%" (25%)
- Data pool is not large enough to properly assess the country's level of access to lessons.

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%

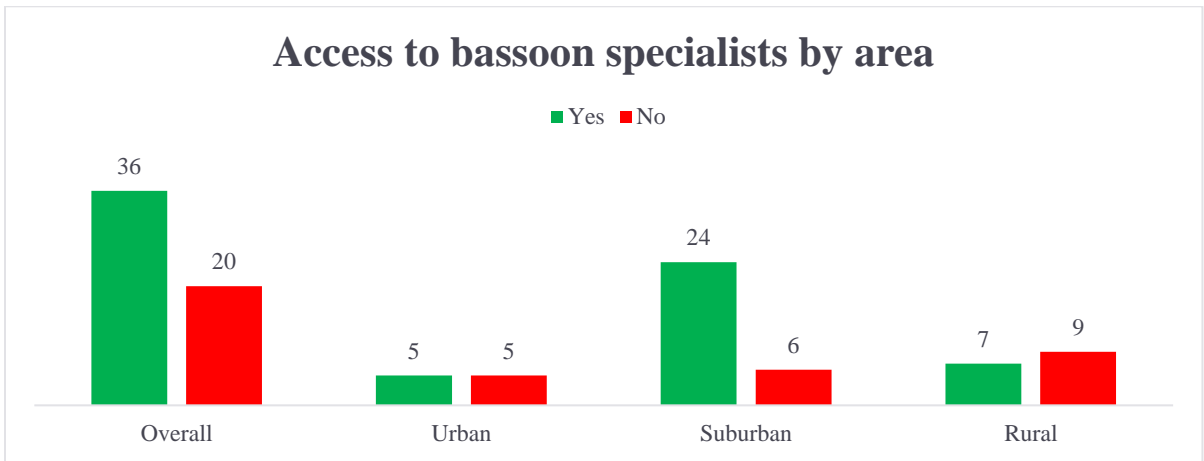


Figure 19

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%.
- Data pool is not large enough to support an accurate representation of level of access throughout the country.

Q14. What is the most difficult barrier to overcome when trying to recruit and retain bassoonists in your program?

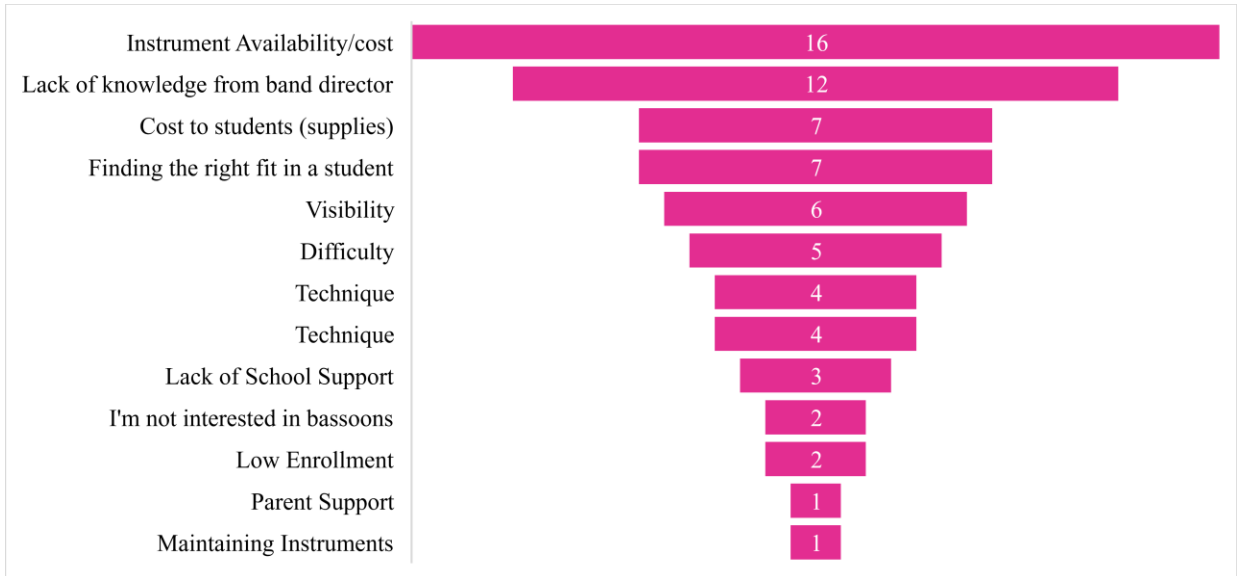


Figure 20

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)

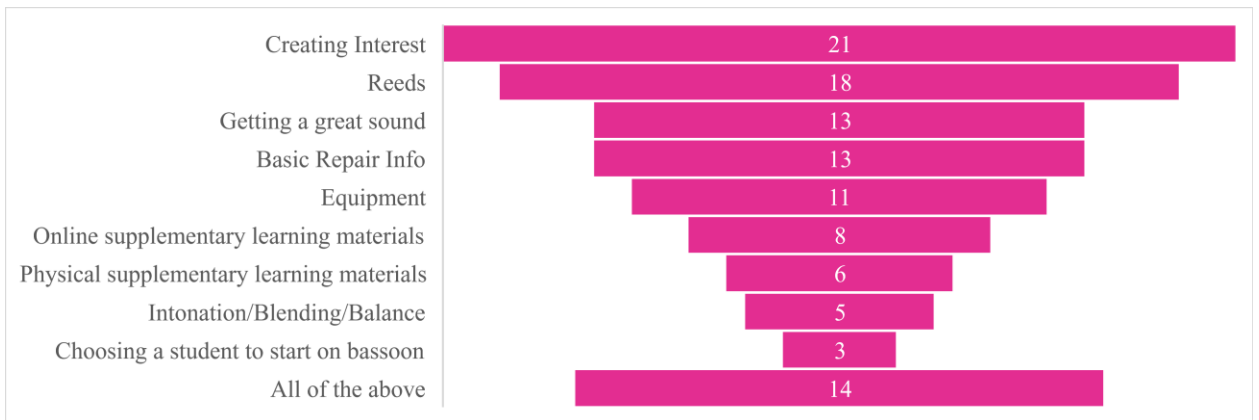


Figure 21

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. A full collection of these stories can be found in Appendices C and D.

In the next section, I present the answers to question 16 of the survey in order to let band directors’ voices be heard. Here I will present fragments of their stories to further understand how they start bassoonists, followed by any barriers they have faced or are still facing in starting, retaining, and nurturing bassoonists in their programs.

***Note: responses have not been edited for grammar or spelling.*

Band Directors' "Starting a Student" Stories

Band directors often have 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 and can supply band directors with new ways of encouraging more new bassoonists.

Below are some of those stories.

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 students 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.

Band Director Barriers

The most common barriers mentioned by participants in the band director survey are budget, student ability, and a lack of knowledge of the instrument on the band director's part. Without directly referencing how many of these band directors have or encourage private teachers in their schools, it appears that one of the biggest factors in the barrier of student ability is simply not having kids who are committed enough to learn the instrument. The word "difficulty" is used many times in these answers in relation to the bassoon's required skill level. "Cost" is also mentioned many times, sometimes in relation to the student not being able to afford supplies and sometimes because the school itself does not have the budget for an instrument.

When asked if their school would be able to borrow instruments from other schools in their district if needed, participants said that lending instruments within the district is allowed in at least 50% of schools, though not all schools have instruments to loan. The answer "Lack of knowledge" on the band director's part is usually combined with not being able to support a beginning bassoonist properly in beginning sound or technique. Some answers specifically mentioned the low visibility of the instrument as a contributing factor in the students' lack of interest in the instrument.

Answers that should be considered in the context of changes to programs due to COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021 are: instrument sharing, and online lessons hindering or turning off beginning bassoonists, as it is much harder to see, hear, and assess their issues in an online environment. This band director describes this situation: "This is the first year of teaching bassoon virtually, it has been hard explaining the basics over video. Students often do not want to learn bassoon, so we try to get them to stick with it through

mentoring from older students.” Another issue mentioned was trusting the students with these expensive instruments: “middle schoolers are clumsy and even the best students often damage them.” A few participants mention their biggest barrier as time: “having the time and skill to switch a kid to bassoon without having a specialist to help get them started.” One barrier mentioned by band directors that aligns directly with a specific barrier to bassoonists themselves is the trend of bassoonists experiencing slower progress than their peers.

Analysis of Survey Results

Both surveys 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. It is important to compare the two surveys when it comes to two different perspectives on beginning bassoon, and equally important to apply the survey results to the research in secondary materials that I have written about previously. In this section, I will connect data from each survey to find 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. Looking at Figure 5 (pp.28), 33% of bassoonists start taking lessons immediately after acquiring the instrument, leaving 66% of bassoonists to 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 has little to no knowledge of where to find good reeds. This concept of a "wall" in learning may be related to the most popular answer to question 3 (Figure 5, pp. 28) – 39% of bassoonists took lessons at least one year or more after acquiring the instrument.

It's also important to note how many bassoonists claimed that they were "self-taught" or "on their own" in their origin stories or challenges (See Appendix B). Not all of these claims were specifically mentioned 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 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, pp. 28) shows that 91% of bassoon students successfully take private lessons for at least three months at some point. In the Band Director Bassoon survey (Q12, pp. 56), 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, an average of 75% of bassoonists seek private lessons, showing their determination to learn more about the instrument, seek community in the world of bassoon, and 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. A few stories provided from the Bassoon Origins survey show

this in detail (see Appendix B). Assessing issues of access in general starts with a basic survey of availability. The Bassoon Origins survey (Q2, pp. 27) and the Band Director survey (Q13, pp. 57) 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 (Figure 3 & 4, pp. 26 & 27) and 67% of band directors (Figure 19, pp. 57) 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 (Figure 3 & 4, pp. 26 & 27) and 45% of band directors (Figure 19, pp. 57) were from rural areas. The levels of access to bassoon specialists shown in these surveys are consistent with my 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 4 (pp. 29): “What instrument was the first one you ever learned?”, it’s important to note that this does not represent all bassoonists who start playing in United States public schools, 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 (Figure 6, pp. 29), 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 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 answer “Sound” included a description, “you saw a demonstration, watched a video, or heard a soloist play,” which amplifies the need for demonstrations by bassoon experts in schools as well as 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. This increases the need for more emphasis on introducing the bassoon to students regardless of age or musical level, with the intent of creating a spark within students who may want to pursue the bassoon in the future.

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 (Figure 9, pp. 32). 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 (pp. 53, 54) of the band director survey show 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, as well as if they continued playing a secondary instrument, 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's obvious to me that the results of the survey combined with the comments from questions 10 and 11 (see Appendix B) 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 (Figure 8, pp. 31), with 56% playing bassoon in an ensemble in less than a month. Only a few comments in origin stories (Appendix B) 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. As for question 9 (pp. 34), inquiring about the continuation of a secondary instrument, 94% of bassoonists reported continuing to play a secondary instrument while learning the bassoon (Figure 11, pp. 34), the majority of which (61%) continued on a secondary instrument due to a school requirement.

The most common questions I get as a bassoon specialist from band directors and bassoonists alike are issues related to techniques or reeds. Question 8 (pp. 33) of the Bassoon Origins survey, “Which of the following techniques have you struggled with the most throughout your time as a bassoonist?” directly relates to Band Director survey question 15 (pp. 58), “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 Question 8 (pp. 33) of the Bassoon Origins survey were Articulation/Double Tonguing (26%), Reed Issues (25%), and Intonation/Stability (17%) (Figure 10, pp. 33). The three most popular answers to question 15 (pp. 58) of the Band Director survey were “Creating Interest,” “Reeds in general,” and “getting a great sound” (Figure 21, pp. 58). These answers directly relate to each other, suggesting that both technique and reeds should be a focus for both young bassoonists and band directors when helping them solve problems or creating 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 – in 100 responses to the Bassoon Origins survey, cost was specifically mentioned 41 times, significantly more than any other barrier. In 32 responses to the Band Director survey, cost was specifically mentioned 16 times. From this 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 of both bassoonists and band directors in both the set survey questions and the open-ended comments. A common answer from question 14 (pp. 58) of the Band director survey on barriers to recruiting and retaining students was “Lack of knowledge from band director.” The commonality of this answer directly coincides 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 (pp. 51-52) 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 (pp. 51) asked about the number of instruments owned by

schools. Though numbers of bassoons owned varied greatly between participants, I have provided averages of instruments based on location (Figure 13, pp. 52). 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 specifically show me 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, though there are eight schools reporting that they own no bassoons at all. If we take a look at the percentage of schools in each type of area, we find 26% of suburban schools, 0% of urban schools, and 31% of rural schools do not own any bassoons.

When trying to find immediate solutions for this problem, I asked if borrowing instruments was a possibility in Question 6 (Figure 14, pp. 53); 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 in their program (Question 7, Figure 15, pp. 54), the results were almost equal between wooden and polypropylene (plastic) bassoons. Question 8 (Figure 16, pp. 54) asked which factor was most important to each band director when choosing a bassoon to buy, and 57% responded with the answer "Durability" being 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.

A surprising answer in the open-ended answers of the Bassoon Origins Survey that I didn't anticipate was that of bassoonists learning the bassoon privately from someone who did not primarily play the bassoon (not a bassoon specialist). This barrier may have been solved by the increase in online lessons due to the outbreak of COVID-19, but also may suggest there is more of a need for bassoon specialists to be 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 time or money to come to the aid of their students in need. It's important to understand how much support some band directors provide for their students just to help their students pursue an interest. It may be helpful for bassoon teachers to seek financial help from outside sources to provide or refer students to scholarships. While discounts on reeds and lessons can be seen as giving a service away for free, perhaps we can view them as an investment in a musician's future instead, taking a page from the band directors who work so hard to help their students realize their dreams, sometimes at a personal cost.

Conclusion

In my time as a private bassoon teacher, I've taught many students, but I'm sure there are a number of students I don't get to see at all, simply because of the barriers keeping them from me. 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, which is a major deterrent from the ultimate goal of creating more bassoonists. 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 live bassoon teachers or performers as suburban or urban communities, 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 seeing those things in person. The Bassoon Origins and Band Director surveys both showed that rural schools had generally lower access to instruments and instruction. Thirty-one percent of band directors said their program had no bassoons to give to students, which is consistent with Dr. Lowe's survey

results, and many of the stories from the Bassoon Origins survey mention a barrier of finances to buy materials and instruments, or distance to a teacher, or both.

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 you do not live. While there are barriers in front of band programs and students, there are also barriers in front of making a living as a professional commuting bassoonist. I was told multiple times that the hourly rates for private teachers were extremely low compared to mine, no mileage was provided for long drives unless you were going there for something like college teaching or performing with an orchestra, and there's only a small chance that the school will even have a bassoon readily available for a student who may not stick with the instrument without a consistent connection to a teacher. If there are so many barriers in place to teaching in person for both the teacher and the student, perhaps our constantly evolving online capabilities can help alleviate that stress.

Often, even if I was able to set up an online lesson with a student, their internet connection wouldn't be strong enough to sustain a zoom call without pausing every few minutes. It is essential that we start creating online and print resources that don't involve a strong internet connection. Band directors Chandran Daniel's and Stan Johnson's stories 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 Lowe's 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 are more detailed in problem solving, so they can teach themselves more effectively (2022).

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 run “Band Director Boot Camp” for many years, a three-day workshop where all 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 (2022). 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 when there is a lack of understanding and

provide support where needed, we can surely boost the bassoon population with their help.

Regardless of age, location, or position, the biggest barrier to the bassoon for all bassoonists and band directors is finances. The bassoon is a specialty instrument, with many layers to understanding how the bassoon works and how to play it beautifully. Every step of the way, bassoonists face barriers to starting or continuing the instrument: finding affordable reeds, finding a good bassoon teacher, and buying and maintaining an instrument can all be challenging. Lowe's research shows that the quality of instruments around the country is often not good enough to properly support potential or continuing bassoon students. Instruments are commonly borrowed from public schools and colleges, but sometimes the quality of the instrument holds a student back from playing their best (2022). After school, they need to find a way to purchase an instrument to continue, which can be intimidating and frustrating when they don't know where to look, or how to afford one.

The most popularly mentioned issue faced in the comments of both the Bassoon Origins and the Band Director surveys of my own research was "reeds." Consistently good reeds that play easily and in tune are often difficult to find for band directors and bassoonists with no prior knowledge of reeds or the bassoon. Handmade reeds can be more expensive than the less consistent and often low-quality mass-produced reeds. This can be an automatic deterrent for a student or band director with no knowledge of the difference in quality and what a low-quality reed means for the possibility of student success on the bassoon.

Finding a teacher is often challenging due to a few factors: location, teacher quality, cost, and of course finding a good fit for the student. Band directors also struggle with finding bassoon teachers willing to come to their school, if the school even allows teachers to visit during the school day. While online lessons have become a great way to make a connection to a teacher that is far away, not every student thrives in online lessons, and teaching beginner bassoonists online is extremely difficult when the teacher can't see many details of embouchure or finger placement. All these financial and logistical barriers point to the need for more outreach from professional bassoon teachers to band directors in their area. Many band programs in Minnesota have a budget specifically for students who need help with the cost of reeds, books, and lessons, and sometimes band booster clubs even provide scholarships that are reserved for the instruments lacking in numbers, which almost always includes the bassoon.

Helping with the cost of the bassoon is probably the most difficult barrier to break. In my experience, the cost of reeds and instruments usually has a lot to do with quality, which is directly connected to the knowledge barrier in band directors and their ability 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* (Perry, 2018) and Elpus and Abril's (2011) suggestions to help band programs financially: to fundraise directly for the program with the help of grants, donors, and corporate sponsors. Abril and Bannerman (2015) 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 school music department can really make a huge difference in their own financial needs as well as that of their bassoonists through fundraising. Support from local bassoon teachers may provide bassoon-specific ideas to fundraise to support bassoon students specifically. It's important for local bassoonists to rally around our local band directors to create solutions that help everyone financially and create a sustainable fund for bassoonists in band programs to thrive.

Call for further research

Though issues of access are widely understood in the bassoon community, there is a stark lack of research regarding how to go about understanding, teaching about, and beginning to help lift the negative stigma surrounding the bassoon. There is also a lack of research (though no lack of opinion) on teaching beginning bassoon in general and what is most effective from the perspective of private teachers and/or band directors. If creating interest is one of the biggest questions of band directors, it's 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 high cost of the instrument, the difficulty of technique compared to other band instruments and the "specialist" nature needed to effectively teach the bassoon, we also need to find a way forward in creating wider access and more inclusivity for the instrument in general. 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 would greatly increase the efficiency of this research, pointing to needs in specific areas to which I may not have been able to call attention.

Continuing Projects

This thesis was intended as a springboard to further professional projects, and hopefully as inspiration for other bassoon specialists to recognize a need to do the same. Online resources have become increasingly popular as the population grows, the wealth gap continues to deepen, and many primary and secondary schools continue to have issues finding funds to keep their music departments running smoothly. While I recognize that there is no substitute for in-person instruction, I also understand that not everyone has the luxury of studying with a professional bassoonist of their choice in person. Online lessons have become more popular, but they still aren't ideal for several reasons. There simply aren't enough solutions to the issue of accessing in-person lessons for both bassoonists and band directors. My hope is to create some of my own opportunities to infuse my own community with a positive view of the bassoon.

The first opportunity targets band directors specifically. On the issue of access to information in pre-service education techniques classes, I plan to design a workshop for band directors to further their education on the bassoon and learn how to teach it effectively in the beginning stages.

The second opportunity targets both beginning bassoonists and band directors. I plan to design a website and/or book series that will teach students how to play the bassoon based on sound. There are already great resources online for bassoonists, but none are streamlined towards teaching how to listen for issues and directly connect them to a technique that will solve the problem. I plan to create an interactive resource with many elements: songs with multiple transpositions so band directors can play along on other instruments to help students learn intonation, exercises that specifically work on commonly misunderstood techniques or bad habits that can form when learning on your own, audio clips that help bassoonists understand what they're hearing when something goes wrong, as well as how to fix those issues, video demonstrations of performances of etudes, duets, and specific techniques, and a regularly updated list of scholarship opportunities, trusted bassoon repair technicians, reed makers, and other useful free resources for bassoonists and band directors alike. My intent with this project is not to take away the job of private teachers, but to help bassoonists who can't afford lessons understand and have fun with the bassoon on their own, and to help alleviate the already spread thin schedule of band directors who don't have time to teach private lessons to new bassoonists.

Finally, I plan to try making more regular appearances at educator conventions, making sure that band directors who want more information on the bassoon have a solid connection and can learn more about the instrument free of judgement.

It's no secret that the bassoon is not an easy instrument to learn, teach, or afford. Issues of equity and access create barriers in front of the bassoon for both bassoonists themselves and the band directors who guide them. Solutions to these barriers do exist,

and it's up to us as professional bassoonists and teachers to put them into action. The bassoon community is a strong, unique, and welcoming one, but it remains a bit hidden from the rest of the music world. 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 bassoon and help band directors recruit, retain, and nurture their bassoon students. Let's help the less fortunate in our community get 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.

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Appendix A
IRB Approval

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

April 5, 2021

Dear Keitha Hamann:

IMPORTANT: All human research conducted at the University of Minnesota must adhere to the [IRB guidance and requirements](#), [Office of the Vice President for Research guidance](#), and the [Medical School/Office of Academic Clinical Affairs Sunrise Implementation Plan](#) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Non-medical school investigators should contact their Associate Dean for Research for information on the "sunrise" process.

Even with IRB approval, in-person research visits may not take place without documented approval by either the Medical School/OACA sunrise process or the Associate Dean for Research sunrise process. These reviews are intended to protect the health of all research participants and the broader University/Fairview communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers must inform the IRB of their approved sunrise plans. The IRB will document the approval status on ETHOS via a comment in the study history section. Please note that IRB approved COVID-19 related research is exempt from the sunrise requirements.

All researchers should review the guidance for the IRB, the medical school and their own departments as guidance is updated frequently.

On 4/5/2021, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Bassoon Beginnings: Creating online resources for bassoonists and band directors
Investigator:	Keitha Hamann
IRB ID:	STUDY00011796
Sponsored Funding:	None
Grant ID/Con Number:	None
Internal UMN Funding:	None
Fund Management Outside University:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed with this Submission:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bassoon Origin Survey, Category: Other; • Detwiler HRP-587, Category: Consent Form; • Detwiler HRP-580 Social Protocol, Category: IRB

	Protocol; • Recruitment Materials, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Band Director Survey, Category: Other
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The IRB determined that this study meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To arrive at this determination, the IRB used “WORKSHEET: Exemption (HRP-312).” If you have any questions about this determination, please review that Worksheet in the [HRPP Toolkit Library](#) and contact the IRB office if needed.

This study met the following category(ies) for exemption:

- (2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
 - (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects

Ongoing IRB review and approval for this study is not required; however, this determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a Modification to the IRB for a determination.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the [HRPP Toolkit Library](#) on the IRB website.

For grant certification purposes, you will need these dates and the Assurance of Compliance number which is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA00004003).

Sincerely,

Victoria Mercer
 IRB Analyst

We strive to provide clear, consistent and timely service to maintain a culture of respect, beneficence and justice in research. [Complete a brief survey](#) about your experience.

Appendix B

Answers to Bassoon Origins Survey Questions #10 and #11

I combined questions 10 and 11 because many participants went into detail in question 10 and referred to it in question 11 instead of writing a different answer, and vice versa. These stories are not edited for clarity. They are told in the exact words that were provided in the results.

10. 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.

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

- 6th grade: My parents didn't even know what a bassoon was. They thought I was bringing home an oboe, so when they heard the price, it was a shocker. 7th - 8th: So we rented from the school but the school had 4 bassoonists and 2 rundown bassoons. I learned on my own for about 2.5 years, which developed bad habits. Breaking reeds all too often that costed \$20 for a Jones. Oh and from middle to high school, there was never an orchestra. 9th grade, my high school director said I needed to improve, because I was going nowhere. But I didn't want a clarinet teacher that just happens to know a lil bassoon. I wanted a BASSOONIST that specializes in it, 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. A friend in high school, flutist, told me there was a youth symphony in the city I could audition for. (That was also expensive). So I did and got in then met like minded people in music.
- Affording a bassoon is still a challenge, even though I have one from my university to use, for now. I also ended up getting scholarships for lessons with both of my past private teachers, as my family didn't have enough money to pay weekly for lessons.
- Affording an instrument/low-quality school instruments were definitely a hindrance, as well as bad music score bought reeds
- Affording lessons, instrument, reed tools
- Affording reeds and bassoon accessories
- All of the above at different times
- Although access to bassoonists was available, they did not have the skill to provide good reeds, the correct foundation, and their approach was more of a "band" approach. I think it is important to have exposure to all types of ensembles, which would have helped me understand that the bassoon has a long history and important status. The techniques of playing repertoire with so many notes, different key signatures, and clef changes is vital.

- Always struggled with reeds. I did take two lessons from a bassoonist after my first year. He entirely changed my embouchure.
- availability of a quality instrument. Faced a lot of emotional pressure to carry a “section” by myself as the only bassoonist, who also had
- Availability of instruments—parents had to purchase for me to continue playing in high school
- Bad teaching in college, discouraging experience.
- barely had learned to play clarinet when the band director moved me to bassoon
- Bassoons are expensive and my family made sacrifices to afford a nice one
- Cannot afford to purchase my own instrument so I had to play what is available. Many issues with old/cheap instruments.
- Carrying bassoon to school or home.
- Cost of instrument
- Cost was an issue - both with obtaining a good instrument and reeds.
- Could not afford to buy a professional instrument
- Could only use a school instrument. Too expensive to buy.
- Couldn't afford local bassoon teachers. Didn't know to buy handmade reeds so I played factory reeds like Jones
- Didn't understand reeds should be adjusted and I don't think I ever used a vent key
- Distance and availability of teacher and supplies
- Due to the cost of a bassoon, my high school lesson teacher helped my family purchase my instrument.
- Early access to a real bassoon teacher was the main obstacle. My band director was a percussionist and he sent me and the other beginning bassoonist into a practice room with the standards of excellence book to teach ourselves. I made it through and became a professional bassoonist, the other quit later that year.
- Every challenge, I was on my own.
- Finance issues
- finances; learning tenor clef;
- Financial
- Financial issues
- Financial issues buying a bassoon after high school.
- Financials! No one told when I committed to playing it (and fell in love with it) how costly it would be. I also ended up taking lessons from a flute teacher, which impacted my playing in college. I never studied with a primary bassoon player throughout my 13 years of instruction.
- finding decent reeds
- Finding Reed making supplies and what works for my reeds.
- Finding reeds that I liked
- For most of my time in HS, the closest teacher was 1.5 hours away.
- having a teacher close and being able to afford it
- Having good reeds is a constant challenge.
- Having skipped the normal timing/experience of starting a wind instrument, I didn't get the breathing basics (I equated "support" with exertion, effort, forcing).

- I actually never owned my own instrument until grad school. I definitely got some weird vibes when I had to email my new applied prof to see how to get an instrument.
- I am from a rural area so an eighth grader helped me get started and then I was on my own. I am now a music education major in college with my primary instrument being bassoon.
- I could not afford to buy an instrument. For my first few years of college, as a performance major, I was playing on a school owned instrument. I started later than those who were my peers at summer camps, and was made fun of for my bright sound. They called me a "bee" and drew and sent me pictures of bees. haha. Joke's on them! Now I'm a kick ass professional bassoonist! ;)
- I did not have access to a professional bassoon teacher in my town. A band director from another high school helped me to learn to make a reeds. I had to use the schools instrument through college actually.
- I didn't have access to a teacher because I wasn't told about any teachers in my area. I also could not afford lessons even if I could take them.
- I didn't have lessons until I got into college, so I spent a lot of time relearning the instrument
- I drove an hour each way for private lessons in high school, from Bloomington to St. Paul.
- I had exactly one lesson. I did not have the resources available to seek private lessons or hand made reeds until well into adulthood. I had to play on store bought reeds which I did not know we're so bad at the time.
- 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 always struggled to have a good reed to practice on and for lessons.
- 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 lived in a small town with no Bassoon teachers. The bassoon player at the high school who was a couple years older than I was taught me to play. A high school band director from another school helped me learn to make reeds. I could not afford my own instrument so I used the high schools into Sturman and later the college's instrument. I was in my mid-20s before I bought my own Bassoon...
- I never had to opportunity to buy my own bassoon, so for my last 7 and a half years of playing, I've been playing off school bassoons and will continue to do so in college
- I only took bassoon privately once I started college. It was my tertiary instrument. I studied it for 7 semesters in college.
- I switched to bassoon in 7th grade and had no teacher until college. Only plastic school bassoons. I learned bad fingerings that should have been alternates or trill fingerings. I bought cheap reeds from a music store in a mall. I learned to make reeds as hard as boards with bad tone. I developed TMJ disorder at age 41 and had to change my embouchure and reeds to keep playing. Bought my first good

bassoon at age 52. I developed tendonitis in my right arm and mononeuropathy in my right thigh from practicing 4-6 hours a day for an audition. At 61 I'm still playing in community orchestras and musicals.

- I think the hardest part was finding the right reed. My private teacher introduced me to a reed that I used throughout high school and into college but after outgrowing that reed I cannot find a reed I love and I struggle with reed making even though I LOVE IT!
- I traveled 180 miles round trip for lessons with the nearest bassoon teacher
- I was learning band instruments in middle and high school with my band director (with the idea I would go into music ed) but the rural schools did not have bassoons.
- I was the only bassoonist in my school district. The nearest bassoon teacher was more than an hour away and my family could not afford lessons.
- I was very much a self-taught player and my band director didn't know much. I was playing reeds that were utter garbage and my school instrument was in pretty poor condition first starting out.
- I would play on the same 1-2 reeds for months and years because I simply could not afford to pay for them. Later, once I appeared more serious to my parents, I was able to take lessons and buy reeds more regularly meaning every few months. Bassoonists were very inaccessible for me due to proximity so I started learning with a Sousaphonist who also loved the bassoon. After a year I started taking lessons with a bassoon professor. Although I only took a lesson every couple of months, I fared far better doing so than not. I was extremely lucky and privileged to have had access to a Fox 240 while in high school or I likely wouldn't still be playing the bassoon.
- improper fingering charts, Jones reeds
- 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
- It was hard to find a quality bassoon. I ended up renting from MMI. Many urban schools in my area don't have access to bassoons. I ended up taking lessons at ESM and they were very expensive.
- It was hard to find decent time to practice as a student- other clubs, homework, etc.
- It was very difficult getting myself started on the bassoon and staying motivated, since everyone else in my high school band was already comfortable and confident on their instruments. It felt like I was behind everyone else and kind of lost for the first few months of rehearsals.
- Lack of finance and poorly maintained school instruments were a huge detriment to me
- Lack of help to fix pitch.
- Lack of resources - I never knew you could adjust reeds to improve intonation. Nor did my band director - it was always pull out the bocal.

- Lack of resources and general where to look. It felt very much a thing of you had to know the right people and if you didn't, well you were kinda sol. And financing an instrument is still a challenge
- Lack of resources to learn. It was difficult as my regular band director didn't know anything about bassoon and I couldn't ask him about fingerings or access a decent fingering chart.
- Lessons were a big issue for me, there wasn't a teacher in the area so I ended up having to go to a neighboring city an hour away for lessons every month.
- My bassoon teacher didn't like making reeds, so I was never taught. Also, the importance of a good bocal was never explained to me. I didn't realize until quite recently how much a different bocal can affect our sound, affect the ability to play the top range, affect the ability to project, etc.
- My family struggled with finance issues. All bassoonists at my school were required to take private lessons, which could be expensive. Fortunately the school had bassoons, but we did not get to play on the decent ones until junior year.
- 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
- My parents were luke warm about music...I got little or no support from them. More active and guiding parents might have opened more doors more quickly. And figuring out reeds on my own was pretty rough. I played on what I would consider to be nightmare reeds for a long time.
- 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 from late 50's
- No one gave me any coaching so I didn't even know about flicking, half-hole for notes other than the one indicated in the basic book, reed adjusting, etc..
- No one in my area knew bassoon, but the school had one that was donated AGES ago. When I got braces, flute was hard to play, so we decided to get me an instrument where I could put something inside my mouth (which was much easier)...But the only instrument left was bassoon. My family was really poor and we couldn't afford any of the reeds or accessories. Thankfully my director knew our family well and added it to his budget. Both in middle and high school (2 different directors). Both had absolutely no experience on bassoon, didn't learn it in their methods classes in college, but were very excited to have one in band. I learned on my own for 6 years. I did tons of research, read books and blogs, watched videos. I earned music department awards every year in high school. Got a scholarship to play in college and then was required to take private lessons. Liked my teacher but he was just a hobby player. In college, of course, I had to pay for everything on my own. Thankfully the school had a bassoon (and contrabassoon!!!) I could use. Knowing my financial situation and care for instruments, they didn't make me pay a rental fee. (Boy was I lucky!) After leaving college, I actually went back to teach in my school district and the high school let me borrow the bassoon so I could keep playing, until recently, a student expressed interest in playing so now I am left with no bassoon. They would like me to teach lessons eventually (when the student is in high school- hes 7th grade

right now), but I don't have an instrument to play. I am a choral music teacher part time, I can't afford a bassoon with all the student debt and everything else with having kids etc. Even the not-so-great student model that I could make work is just so expensive. All of us music teachers always talk about how challenging it is because bassoon is great, but the colleges don't encourage double reeds in methods, and no one plays it or donates it to a school like a trumpet or other brass instrument. I still would never go back and change to clarinet or something. Bassoon changed my life in so many ways. I just so desperately wish I could afford a few thousand dollars to throw into purchasing one.

- Not too many resources to learn from
 - Obtaining quality reeds
 - Played clarinet tenor sax and bassoon in HS band. My hands hurt from carrying the instruments and my books to/from school every day. I didn't have a bassoon stand so I kept the bassoon on my lap while playing clarinet.
 - purchasing an instrument at the end of HS
 - Reed making. 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 major changes up through my undergrad and a bit into masters to not be fighting my reed and instrument to play
 - 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...
 - Reeds were expensive for my family
 - Reeds were going bad too quickly because I did not rinse them with fresh water.
 - Reeds!!!! My teacher was amazing with supplying reeds and teaching me how to adjust them. I just simply don't have time to make reeds while practicing all the other doubles.
 - Reeds..did not know how to make or adjust until I was about 30.
 - Reluctant parents to support my bassoon playing because of cost and lack of understanding classical music. I was able to secure scholarships for music camps and youth symphony. My father did buy me a bassoon when I was a senior when it was evident I was very serious. A huge sacrifice, as was college.
-
- School plastic Selmer bassoon and synthetic bassoon Reed made for bad starting sound quality.
 - small hands and fingers. When I bought a fox bassoon, we took it to the factory and they adjusted some of the keys
 - Small hands!
 - Still have issues affording reed supplies at 25 years old and affording a contrabassoon seems like an impossible dream.
 - Studied both saxophone and bassoon. When I told this to people during master classes I was encouraged to quit one rather than be a competent doubler. I regret listening to people who told me to quit saxophone, because I make more money teaching saxophone lessons than bassoon
 - Terrible reeds, not a great lesson teacher (only had access to one teacher)

- The closest private teacher when I began lessons was 45 minutes away. Affording an instrument was also a significant issue for me from my first student instrument all the way up to the two professional instruments I've had at various points in my career.
- 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.
- The only challenges I had when starting the bassoon were: the only book my band director had available was the Rubank Elementary Method (not too bad, but the fingering chart wasn't too helpful), and lugging the bassoon back and forth to school. The only other challenge I had was hearing myself in band.
- The quality of instruments available was poor.
- There was only a handful of bassoon teachers in my area, and they were all woodwind doublers with bassoon as a secondary instrument. They were able to get me started initially, but did not have the best advice when it came to fingerings or other techniques like flicking or half holes.
- 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 didn't have my first bassoon lesson until I was studying in college. When I first started playing I also had issues with the quality of my school's bassoon, however I was able to purchase my own after a year of playing.
- Two hour drive to nearest teacher!
- Used school-owned instrument in primary and high school. After one summer of lessons with my band director (who was oboe player) between third and fourth grade, was totally self-taught (in many ways wrongly taught) with no possibility for lessons. Never learned about flicking/venting (still a mystery to me!) or double-tonguing. Financial limitations prevented me from owning my own instrument until age 63. Opportunities to play in rural areas where I lived most of my life would have made playing very difficult. Finally took lessons for one semester from university professor until Covid made that impossible. Presently play in 4 community bands, private college chamber winds, and occasional church ensembles.
- When I moved to Michigan, the closest teacher was 45 minutes away, which was challenging, but luckily my parents were supportive and had time to drive me.

Appendix C

Answers to Band Director Survey Question #10

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

- When I taught k-12 it was simply lack of instruments.
- Equipment.
- Old age
- kids aren't familiar with it
- They start to learn as a secondary but don't stick with it
- Cost of reeds, time available for private lessons
- Technique, ability, attractiveness of instrument
- Bassoons are expensive and the school doesn't own any. I also don't have any interest in them. I don't even have interest in the oboe.
- Finding a kid with the right qualifications
- Trusting them with the instruments - middle schoolers are clumsy and even the best students often damage them.
- Instrument availability and price
- I think the biggest one is my middle schools don't start any double reeds. The first chance for bassoon is high school.
- Lack of bassoon knowledge on my part
- Size of the child and willingness to switch. (By the time they are big enough, they don't want to switch.)
- The price of the instrument and reeds.
- Having the time and skill to switch a kid to bassoon without having a specialist to help get them started.
- Higher cost compared to other instruments (reeds, etc), lack of school owned instruments and low interest levels probably due to lack of visibility
- Reed price
- Need to ration repair money.
- Numbers of other instrument areas do not warrant switching a student to bassoon.
- My own lack of knowledge; not getting a great sound immediately and giving up.
- cost of reeds and supplies
- getting them to play it and they've never heard of it
- Interest, support
- Availability of instruments
- Instrument purchase

- Student desire, commitment
- This is the first year of teaching bassoon Virtually has been hard explaining basic over video. Students often do not want to learn bassoon so we try to get them to stick with it through mentoring from older students.
- We aren't equipped to teach it well ourselves, so it's the only instrument in our program we can't offer valuable lessons on with the staffing we have at school.
- No barrier
- The difficulty of making good sounds early and feeling successful
- Reading in the bass clef
- Only one of the feeders starts them, generally.
- Generating interest and provide ongoing support (if not already in lessons)
- The need for players in more vital sections such as clarinets.
- Commitment, parent support
- Price!!!
- Price to purchase one
- I work at a private school and they won't give me the funds to buy one and our school is expensive so they don't allow fund raising
- instrument too costly
- I am not comfortable with the instrument, I teach tiny people
- The instrument is usually too difficult for beginning players.
- Low income student cannot afford reeds, usually, and district does not provide enough money to buy them regularly for the students.
- How to start them
- Difficult and expensive
- Cost, my school is 91% free and reduced lunch population.
- lack of knowledge from other directors
- They are the smart kids who end up going to other schools due to charter schools that focus on career path ways. Such as med high for students who want to Pursue a career in medicine.
- No time in schedule to work with them one on one
- Cost of reeds and equipment, as we provide 100% of school supplies. Students keeping up with other instruments and not progressing much slower is also a challenge.
- Large heavy instrument, double reed difficulty
- Difficulty, students frustrated with taking care of reeds-soaking them, not having 1:1 lesson offerings in my district anymore.
- Lack of serious support in music scheduling - supporting STEM and not the arts.
- Price, availability of decent reeds
- Only one school owned instrument- with Covid no sharing
- Exposure/experience

Appendix D

Answers to Band Director Survey: Question 16

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

- As a private teacher, I probably started 10-15 students on bassoon. I had a phenomenal oboe player who wanted to learn bassoon so she could learn an instrument with her peers in middle school.
- Can't tell you one story, I had a process that worked great. 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 on into high school and college.
- Cellist moved to school. He took up the bassoon with minimal issues
- I had a clarinet student eager to play bassoon. I fanned the flame! I found him a bassoon to borrow, taught him from the very beginning and encouraged his efforts.
- I had a clarinetist who learned every note on the clarinet in his method book in his first year. He seemed like he was up for the challenge.
- I had a kid once who wanted to play bassoon, but at that time I had no access to an instrument nor a working knowledge of bassoon. She did bass clarinet with me for 4th and 5th and switched to bassoon in 8th grade and played through high school.
- I had a strong alto sax player who was interested in bassoon and asked to play. He was a strong self directed learner and did awesome with the minimal assistance available during a full band rehearsal. He was not interested in taking private lessons or coming after school for extra help, but he played his parts accurately in the band and was a good contributor.
- I had a student who initially played trombone and wanted to learn bassoon. I was hired as a consultant and I would come and give him lessons every other day. He picked up the instrument quick and was doing great improvement. He was caught up by the end of his freshman year. Sophomore year he competed for all valley he placed in the band went in to area. His senior year he advanced to area and unfortunately that year they had just changed the number to state and he missed it by 1 to advance to state. I believe that if the student want to learn the

instrument they will put in the effort if you are pushing the instrument on to a student they won't be successful.

- 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 have a beginning student this year. Bocal Majority was great at helping the parents buy a bassoon. I am in a private school. I am still pretty surprised they chose to start on bassoon! He's doing great. I teach him private lessons outside of the school day.
- I have a student that switched last year from tenor sax. He is doing great and has become one of our strongest low reefs as a sophomore!
- I have never started a student on bassoon, but have switched some students from flute or clarinet to bassoon.
- I start them off with the bassoon videos by Dr. Kristine Fletcher (formerly Dr. Klopfenstein before she got married). She was my bassoon tech teacher in college, and she has a great "intro to bassoon" video and method book. I know enough about bassoon that, after they watch that, I can usually borrow a bassoon from the high school, and play along with them during lessons.
- 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.
- I try to start 1 a year in my ele band.
- I typically transfer trombone players to bassoon within the first 3 months. Most memorable story was teaching a 8th grader how to make reeds.
- I usually have just one at a time and give lessons when I can. Unfortunately I am very busy and don't have as much time for lessons as I would like. (For bassonists and other instruments alike!)
- I usually wait until the students has played another woodwind instrument successfully for a year. I have had way better success in this model. I started using both a neck strap and seat strap when they are first learning to help with the support of the instrument. I also made my own fingering chart that makes way more sense to a younger player.
- One of my private students switched from saxophone to bassoon. I had the bassoon out during our saxophone lesson and she asked about it. I told her the next lesson I could have her play it, after that lesson she started doing half bassoon and half saxophone lessons.

- Student wanted to play Saxophone. I told him if he wanted a real challenge try bassoon and if he did not like he could play saxophone next year. So far he has enjoyed it.
- The first student I started had wanted to ay bassoon since 2nd grade when she heard Peter and the Wolf. I borrowed an instrument from another to get her started.
- they wanted to try it
- This is my first year in this position- but I started a beginner on bassoon. She wanted to join band but didn't have an instrument in mind. I showed her some of them and then bassoon and she was AMAZED. She loves it
- Usually it's a skilled beginning saxophonist
- We start our students at the end of 6th or beginning of 7th grade
- We start students in heterogenous classes. I pick bassoonists who are bright and independent so they can function being the only student playing their instrument in their class. I work with them the same that I would any other beginner.