A FOCUS ON STUDENT CHOICE IN SELECTING ELECTIVE COURSES:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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A FOCUS ON STUDENT CHOICE IN SELECTING ELECTIVE COURSES:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A FOCUS ON STUDENT CHOICE IN SELECTING ELECTIVE COURSES:

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This study explored a policy in a k-12 educational facility in which students are not allowed to choose their elective classes. The study centered around conducting qualitative research to explore each participant’s viewpoint on this policy. Findings showed that this policy is largely unfavorable, and I have made an effort to foster a policy change through action research. As the school’s director of bands, my action plan consists of creating an instrumental music program specifically for engaged students that will initially occur after school academic hours. As students begin to achieve academic success and become recipients of college scholarships as a result of their participation in this program, it is my desire that it encourages a policy change that allows students to choose to remain in band class during the academic school day. Overall, this action plan is designed to promote a policy change in which each student is able to choose what elective classes they are enrolled in during the academic school year.
Dedicated to my family who raised me:

Peggy Hill (Mother)

Anthony Sewell (Father)

Nell Spence (Grandmother)

Robert Spence (Grandfather)

Olema Quinn (Grandmother)

Charlie Quinn (Grandfather)
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CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Introduction

Columbus City Schools is the largest school district in the state of Ohio as our educators serve the needs of more than 51,000 students in 109 public schools. The district’s core values align with academic achievement, continuous improvement, civic stewardship, and life-long learning. Educators in the district are expected to demonstrate compassion, respect, trust, and love to all stakeholders that are involved in the educational process. Columbus City Schools values community engagement and empowerment, as well as equity and diversity. Professionals in leadership positions within Columbus City Schools are expected to work collaboratively, responsibly, and with integrity (Columbus City Schools 2020). Columbus City Schools has adopted a mission statement that states “each student is highly-educated, prepared for leadership and service, and empowered for success as a citizen in a global community” (Columbus City Schools 2020). Upholding this mission statement would suggest that each of our students reaches their full potential and graduates prepared to attend college, serve in the military, start a business, or enter the workforce. The vision statement for Columbus City Schools reads “a world-class model of public education that prepares members of our communities to reach their full potential” (Columbus City Schools 2020). In order to uphold this vision, the school district continuously makes concerted efforts to recruit, develop, and retain highly qualified world-class educators and staff. The vision is also upheld through the creation of safe, student-centered, innovative learning environments. Columbus City Schools deems itself accountable to surrounding communities and
stakeholders. Confidence in the district and our schools is maintained through strategic, responsible, and transparent leadership (Columbus City Schools 2020).

My organization within Columbus City Schools is South High School which is an urban public school that serves students in grades 7-12. I am the new instrumental music teacher at South High and I strive to uphold the aforementioned mission and vision statements by providing a unique and culturally relevant instrumental music educational experience for the students that I educate. South High is a federal Title I school that receives aid based on the large percentage of students who qualify for free breakfast and lunch based on their families’ income. Our student body is also diverse as it pertains to race, culture, and interests. Some of our students speak English as a second language, and some of the parents of those students speak little to no English. Many of our students have learning disabilities that require an individualized education plan that our teachers adhere to in order to put those students in the best position to be academically successful (South High School 2020). The community served by South High School also has a long history of structural inequities including economic depression and historical racism which have created significant opportunity gaps for our students (Upgraded Home 2021).

Statement of the Problem

In our school building, the principal serves as the executive decision maker. The principal collaborates with the assistant principals, and together, they create school policies. Once policies and procedures are created, they are presented to teachers, parents, and students. Teachers enact those policies as we see fit on the daily basis. Both students and teachers have been presented with a handbook that gives detailed information as it pertains to the rules, regulations, and the day-to-day operations of our school building.
Among those policies and procedures include providing each student with a daily class schedule that informs students of what classes they are enrolled in. The topic of this study is centered around the current procedure of scheduling students’ classes as the policy that is in place, in many instances, does not align with our school district’s mission, vision, and goals.

The Problem of Practice

The creation of each student’s daily class schedule at South High presents a unique problem for students as well as educators. Specifically, the issue occurs when it comes to scheduling students in elective courses. In several cases, students are placed in elective courses without the opportunity to select their preferred electives. The term “elective” is defined as an optional study or a course that a student may select from among alternatives ("Definition of elective Dictionary.com" 2020). Our current scheduling policy does not adhere to that definition which can cause a negative impact on students’ educational experience. Students can become bored, unmotivated, and disengaged when they are placed in elective classes without being allowed to choose those courses (Hallam et al., 2016).

This scheduling procedure is problematic as it will not benefit disinterested students nor will it have a positive impact on the success of the elective programs. The current scheduling creation process consists of elements of a poor organizational culture. The organizational culture is strictly from a top-down standpoint in which there is little to no input from stakeholders beyond the principal and assistant principals who create the students’ schedule (Lipsky 2010). Elective course teachers can be looked upon as a subculture that is separate from teachers who teach subjects that are aligned with
standardized testing. The students can also be looked upon as an additional subculture who are unhappy with the lack of student choice within this schedule creation process. Given the scheduling conflict that is in existence along with the instilled subcultures, it can create a culture clash internally (Hatch 2018). It can also contribute to the existing inequities that students are already experiencing.

**Justification of the Problem**

Students and families that we serve already face many opportunity gaps. These gaps can be exacerbated by a failure to consider how opportunities within the school can best serve students’ academic and personal interests. Combining these challenges with a lack of intrinsic motivation to be successful in unwanted elective courses can cause frustration in all stakeholders that are involved. It can also cause several students to receive unfavorable letter grades in their elective classes (Howorth 2001). Furthermore, instilling this neglect for elective courses can actually be deemed as harmful to the objective of obtaining student success on academic and standardized assessments as studies have shown that participation in elective programs and academic success have a strong correlation (Guhn et al., 2019).

A revised procedure that allows student choice of preferred electives will lead to an improved learning environment. Benefits also include a more pleasant and effective atmosphere and more engaged students. Educators will also be able to enhance personal engagement through the existing student engagement. There will be less disciplinary issues and failing grades as students will be motivated to do well. The elective programs will flourish through student empowerment.
Putting an emphasis on implementing student choice when scheduling students in elective courses can play a major role in achieving the goals outlined in Columbus City School’s mission and vision statements. Whether it be through continuing education beyond high school or entering the workforce, the mission and vision of Columbus City Schools is aligned with ensuring that students who are educated in our school district are prepared to be productive adults in society. Taking a serious approach to scheduling students in elective classes can help prepare students to further their education beyond high school or enter the workforce after the completion of high school. As indicated by Cesarone (1999), elective education courses help contribute to the quality of education by fostering critical thinking skills that will be necessary when entering a college or university. Chen (2020) suggests that elective courses also help to develop valuable workforce skills.

Deficiencies in the Organizational Knowledge Record

Similar to many urban public schools, instead of prioritizing student engagement, Columbus City Schools has placed an emphasis on students being able to demonstrate academic achievement via positive results on academic and standardized assessments. During the last two decades, teaching and learning in the United States has become increasingly standardized in an effort to raise student achievement. Many urban school districts maintain a focus on subject areas such as English and mathematics in an attempt to raise test scores (Montgomery 2011). Deficiencies in organizational knowledge are presented in instances in which elective courses are not perceived as important when focusing on student academic achievement. Our school district has made efforts to improve test scores by pulling students out of elective classes twice a week for
standardized test tutoring which has been vastly ineffective and showcases organizational deficiencies in knowledge. These deficiencies in knowledge have a negative effect on student production as it can negatively affect all stakeholders who are involved in the educational process.

**Audience**

The target audience for this study includes all of the stakeholders of educational institutions in which students are not always allowed to choose what elective courses they are scheduled to take. Stakeholders in education include the students, teachers, parents, school staff, school faculty, school board members, community members, and anyone else who has an interest in the education of students (Lindsey et al., 2019). The goal is for these stakeholders to obtain the information in this study, and decide if they believe that a change is warranted.

**Overview of Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this study is to examine the benefit, purpose, and effectiveness of empowering students to choose their elective courses in comparison to having their elective courses chosen for them. I will seek research that pertains to how students perceive elective courses when they elect the courses in comparison to when they do not elect them. I will also seek input concerning what students deem as valuable in elective courses. I will examine if students tend to be more academically successful in elective courses in which they elect in comparison to when they do not elect them. The impact of this study may be important as research findings could possibly encourage a change to the scheduling policy that is currently being practiced within my organization.
This study will employ a phenomenological approach in which I will seek to understand the essence of participation in elective classes and its impact on students. Data will be obtained via interviews and focus groups. In this study, I will address the following research questions:

1. How important is student choice in scheduling elective courses in secondary schools?

2. How do students perceive their elective classes when they have chosen them versus when they have been assigned?

3. What do students consider important or valuable in their elective courses?

4. Do students have improved academic and social outcomes in their elective courses when they choose them compared to when they are assigned?

Limitations

The purpose of this work is organizational level improvement in a single school/district. With that being stated, the findings may not be universally applicable to other school and district contexts. Limitations will also consist of personal bias as I do not agree with the current policy that is in place. I will approach data collection procedures in an ethical manner. I will ensure that my bias will not play a role in my observations.

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study will be centered around Lipsky’s (2010) concept of teachers as Street Level Bureaucrats and as policy makers. This concept consists of a bottom-up approach to policy creation in which teachers will have some
input in the schedule creation process. A bottom-up approach can also be extended to the
students in which students are given three to five class appearances in the course to
decide if they would like to remain in the class or change their interests. This information
can be communicated with the parents, and a collective decision can be made. This
bottom-up approach can engage students and parents letting them know that they actually
have a genuine voice in this process (Lipsky 2010).

Lipsky (2010) also discusses client-centered goals versus organizational goals.
As it pertains to this scheduling problem, these discrepancies are clearly in existence.
Organizational goals are aligned with ensuring that all students simply have elective
courses. Elective course teachers’ goals are centered around Lipsky’s “relation of clients”
and being able to ensure that students in the class are engaged and are reaping the
benefits that the class has to offer through positive relations with clients. In many
instances, elective teachers are unable to achieve that goal due to the number of
nonvoluntary clients within the class (Lipsky 2010).

Student choice has a positive effect on student achievement. My organization
needs to instill a neo-institutional theory to ensure that student choice is valued and our
students can take advantage of the connection between being thoroughly engaged in
elective courses and achievement in other facets of schooling. According to neo-
institutional theory, not only do organizations require raw materials, capital, labor,
knowledge, and equipment, but they also depend upon the acceptance of the societies in
which they operate (Hatch 2018). When offering elective courses to students at the high
school level, it should depend on that student’s acceptance and willingness to take the
course.
Related Research

Elective courses do much more than fill in the gaps to fulfill high school graduation requirements. These courses give students the opportunity to explore new options. They also allow students to study more about a subject in which they are passionate about. Elective courses provide students with the necessary skills to improve creativity that cannot be taught in a traditional classroom environment. They help students discover new things that can quite possibly change the course of their lives (Molloy 2019).

According to Chen (2020), research supports that the elective courses in school programs ultimately lead to better overall progress in students’ core areas of focus. For example, the elective study of foreign or native languages leads to a better understanding of vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, and communicative skills. In studying any of the language arts courses, students tend to see an improvement in their overall speaking and written abilities. If a student chooses a more physically active elective, such as a team sports elective course, students are able to improve their critical thinking strategies by implementing team plans and using problem-solving methods with groups while also working on communication and collaborative dynamics (Chen 2020). These benefits will be in existence in situations in which student choice has been implemented and students are engaged in class learnings.

Student choice in elective classes can also build a student's confidence as well as play a major role in building friendships with other students of similar interests (Thygerson 2020). Rambo (2011) contended that electives reveal the skill sets of some students that might not be obvious in their other classes. This helps students see their
strengths and affords them opportunities to be of value to their classmates. Electives also allow students to build and showcase their natural talents. In students choosing their electives, they can set the tone for a school building and play a huge role in engagement throughout the educational atmosphere (Wolpert-Gawron 2018).

When student choice is implemented, elective courses help to build achievement in all areas of learning because students often feel a sense of success and accomplishment in their chosen elective classes. Students can develop a passion for a subject matter as a result of their initial student choice. For example, after choosing band class in 7th grade, Kristofferson (2018) remained a band student through high school, and became a music-education major at a university. Upon receiving a college degree in music education, Kristofferson became a band teacher. Kristofferson (2018) testifies that “while the class content is important and definitely resonates, there is something about the way the band room makes me feel, and it is something that I want my current students to experience.”

Several educators have articulated the importance of elective courses and the benefits that they offer when students are engaged due to student choice. Howorth (2001) proclaims that students who choose their elective courses out of interest will learn more, enjoy more, and also get higher grades because they have a better understanding of the subject. Ramsden (2010) states that the opportunity to exercise choice of study is a factor encouraging a deep approach to learning. Futterman (2016) contends that students being able to choose a class is huge, and this tends to keep kids motivated to learn. When given the opportunity to choose their elective courses, students will cultivate the benefits of the courses at the highest level. Lampley (2017) reveals that student choice in selecting
elective courses gives them a broader view of the different career paths in which they can possibly pursue.

In contrast, a lack of student choice can seriously affect students’ engagement, learning behaviors, effort, peer groups, and individual achievement (Hedges et al., 2013). A lack of student choice also plays a role in a multitude of students failing classes that they should not have been required to take in the first place (Knight 2016). Some groups of students become immediately disengaged when classes are chosen for them that do not meet their needs (Hallam et al., 2016). Sackstein (2016) declares that elective courses are supposed to be designed to enrich students' learning experiences by allowing them choice in addition to their core classes that are prerequisite for graduation. Furthermore, Strakšienė (2020) suggests that one of the most important values of inclusive education is demonstrating respect for student diversity. Those students who are reluctant learners and ones who struggle academically benefit immensely from being able to choose their elective courses. Those struggling students may be able to develop motivation to do well in all other areas of their academic studies as a result of their engagement in their elective courses.

Pelayo (2018) stated that the main focus of teaching and learning activities in the school should be the students. Wolpert-Gawron (2018) conducted a survey that asked students in grades 6-12 what engaged them the most as learners. Across the nation, student choice ranked high in results, and student choice has also been linked to increases in student effort, task performance, and subsequent learning. In the survey, students also reported that they need to be more connected to their teachers. When students are allowed to choose elective courses, it reflects the interests of the teachers that teach them as well
as the students that choose them. This permits a student to automatically have a self-selected connection to the adult in the room (Wolpert-Gawron 2018).

As a high school student, Knight (2016) writes that real learning thrives when students have real choices. Knight (2016) states that students who have the ability to choose what they would like to learn about in elective courses are more eager to engage with the material. Students have different minds with different interests, and it is unfair if students do not have the opportunity to select their elective courses. Many students feel as if the courses in which they are taking in high school are, many times, not relevant to the field of study they would eventually major in at a higher level of education. A successful outcome is presented when the students are interested and can apply their knowledge learned in classes to their real life (Knight 2016). Elective courses offer options that allow individuals to seek out interests and represents an essential part of the overall educational experience including academic success, college readiness, and workforce preparation.

**Academic Success**

There are multiple studies that have found that students’ active participation in elective programs fosters academic success in core classes as well as standardized tests. According to Guhn and colleagues (2019), high school students who take music courses score significantly better on math, science, and English exams. The study employed educational records from four public school student cohorts to examine relationships between engaged music education students and student achievement in mathematics, science, and English. Music participation was related to higher scores on each subject, and this pattern was more pronounced for students who had a high engagement in
instrumental music. The positive relationships between music engagement and academic achievement were independent of students’ previous achievement, sex, cultural background, and neighborhood socioeconomic status, and were of considerable magnitude. Students who were highly engaged in music were, on average, academically over one year ahead of their peers (Guhn et al., 2019).

Studies at the national and state levels have found significant relationships between arts education and student outcomes. According to an analysis of data submitted to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education by the state’s public-school districts, fine arts education is significantly related to higher standardized test scores, higher attendance, graduation rates, and lower disciplinary rates for serious student infractions (Scheuler 2010). The data showed that levels of student participation in arts education are significantly correlated to multiple measures of student proficiency in mathematics. The data also displayed that student participation in arts education shows a significant and positive correlation with high school graduation rates. Pertaining to the percentage of students who are facing opportunity gaps, the link between arts education and positive district/student indicators was still significant for disciplinary rates, graduation rates, and standardized test scores in mathematics.

Futterman (2016) affirmed that elective classes can fortify the rote skills learned in the core subject areas. The visual arts help strengthen visual learners, music strengthens oral learners, and physical education strengthens kinesthetic learners. Compiled SAT data showed that students with academic experience in music scored higher both in math and verbal. Piano keyboard training boosted math scores. Elective courses have helped students socially and behaviorally as well. Furthermore, the World
Music Central and the Texas Commission on Drug and Alcohol Abuse shared how secondary students who participated in band or orchestra reported the lowest lifetime and current use of all substances (Futterman 2016). These benefits of elective courses are most prominent in situations in which students are engaged due to student choice.

**College Readiness**

Elective programs that are offered through student choice can play a large role in schools’ goals in preparing students for college and career opportunities (Wolpert-Gawron 2018). Eyden (2019) acknowledged that students can use electives to enhance their engagement in college possibilities. Futterman (2016) confirms that several studies show that students are more likely to get a degree or major in a course they took as an elective. Ryan & Deci (2020) argued that intrinsic motivation through student choice encourages students to have a deeper approach to learning which encourages college preparedness. Intrinsic motivation is especially appealing because it translates into desirable behaviors such as choosing challenging tasks, exerting effort, and persistence (Ferrer-Caja & Weiss, 2002). Giving high school students the same freedom as college students will be a step in the right direction for the field of education as allowing students to select elective classes reflects the same process that they will see again in college (Knight 2016).

Elective courses that were chosen in high school can have an extreme impact on the selection of a major course of study in college. In being able to choose their elective options, students might gain a new perspective on their professional calling (Chen 2020). When carefully selected, high school electives can prepare students for the challenges of college academics (Duda 2019). While certain subject areas are essential learning for
anyone who plans to attend college, an environment in which elective classes are chosen for students can leave students ill equipped to make important decisions once they actually reach a college campus. Choosing elective courses that align with individual interests can play a role in helping prepare students to select the right major and coursework in college.

Many students plan their high school education in a manner in which they have the necessary merits to apply to a university upon the completion of high school. If a student is not granted their elective requests, it is possible for that student to miss a merit to get admission to their desired content area of study in college (Kristiansen & Stidsen, 2014). While it is an important aspect of the admission process, colleges and universities are not simply looking for students who only have good grades on their high school transcripts. Institutions of higher education are also looking for well-rounded students who have obtained success in disciplines outside of required core classes. With electives on their transcripts, students get to demonstrate more of who they are as people to prospective schools; and it also shows that they are capable learners with broad curiosities (Orinda Academy 2020).

**Workforce Preparation**

Elective classes can also help build values that connect children to themselves and to their cultures. This can produce workers who are comfortable using many different symbol systems in the workplace such as verbal, mathematical, visual, and auditory (Cesarone 1999). When students make it into the workforce, it is important to remember that certain skills cannot just simply be taught. Employers cannot teach employees creativity, drive, passion, or self-esteem. Those are things students have to discover
within themselves, and elective courses have been shown to help build such skills (Lutz 2018).

According to Cesarone (1999), while choosing electives courses often provides students with new opportunities and fulfilling educational experiences, studies also reveal that electives actually promote better thinking and learning that translates to productivity in the workforce. Studies conducted by Cesarone (1999) show that the study and practice of the fine and performing arts allow students to foster better critical thinking skills. These critical thinking skills build values that connect to fellow colleagues and peers which lead to a more well-rounded employee. In considering art electives, business leaders are realizing that skills in fine and performing arts helps to prepare young people for the workplace. Participation in those programs develops collaborative skills, technological competencies, flexible thinking, and an appreciation for diversity (Chen 2020).

The key factor in elective courses playing major roles in academic success, college readiness, and workforce preparation is that the students who are benefiting are engaged in the elective courses in which they are taking. They were able to choose those elective courses which fostered that engagement. With the immense diversity of the student body at our school, students’ interests in elective classes are going to differ. In turn, each student needs to be enrolled in elective courses that best coincide with their individual interests. As I employ my action research design and methodology, my focus in this research project will be to gain more insight about the role of elective courses and the purposes that they can serve for the students who are educated within my organization.
**Action Research Design and Methods**

This study will consist of an action research design which is a systematic procedure completed by individuals in an educational setting in order to gather information and subsequently improve the ways in which their educational setting operates (Mills 2018). Action research is a process that strives to improve education by incorporating change. Action research also consists of educators working collaboratively to resolve a problem. It involves the specification of the problem, the development of something new, and reflection on its effectiveness (Mertler 2020). An action research design is appropriate in this study in considering that our current procedure of scheduling students in elective classes presents a specific problem in which a change is warranted.

**Positioning Study as an Action Research Study**

Specifically, I will be employing a participatory action research paradigm. Participatory action research focuses on empowering individuals and groups in order to foster a level of social change (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The purpose of participatory action research is to improve the quality of the lives of individuals who make up organizations, communities, and families (Mertler 2020). This specifically applies to this study as empowering students to choose their own elective courses can improve the quality of life for those students and their teachers. Instituting a participatory action research study will also go hand in hand with the phenomenology study approach in which I will also be conducting alongside this participatory action research model.

A phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis will be an ideal approach to this research study. According to Creswell & Guterman (2019), a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived
experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. It is a type of qualitative research that addresses questions about everyday human experiences that are believed to be important sociological or psychological phenomena for a particular group of people. A defining characteristic of phenomenological research is its focus on describing the essence of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it (Merriam & Greiner 2019). This phenomenological study will seek to understand the essence of participation in elective classes and its impact on current and former high school students.

The phenomenological approach to this study in conjunction with the participatory action research model will be extremely significant for the goals of this research. The goals of participatory action research and phenomenology directly align with what I am striving to accomplish in this study. I am gathering data in order to determine if current and former students feel as if the current scheduling policies are justified or if alterations to those policies need to be presented. The phenomenological aspect will allow current and former students to discuss their lived experiences as it relates to this subject matter. The participatory action research aspect will empower participants to express their voice should they feel that a change is needed.

The phenomenological approach will also invoke a deep understanding of human viewpoints. Qualitative data will be collected and analyzed and will consist of interview responses and focus group commentary. This data will draw upon participants’ attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions towards scheduling students for elective courses. Interview and focus group questions will relate to the participants’ viewpoint on student choice in selecting elective classes; the value of elective classes; and the importance of elective classes. My participatory action research and phenomenological
design will be geared specifically towards South High School within the Columbus City School district.

**Site or Population Selection**

South High School serves 973 students from grades 7-12 on the daily basis. Of these 973 students, 175 are in 7th grade; 175 are in 8th grade; 260 are in 9th grade; 175 are in 10th grade; 100 are in 11th grade and 88 are in 12th grade. As it pertains to ethnicity, our student body is 69% African American, 18% white, 6% 2 or more races, 5% Hispanic and 2% Asian. We have 52% male students and 48% female students (South High School 2020). Stakeholders that are currently involved in the scheduling creation process for these students include 1 principal, 4 assistant principals, and 4 counselors.

**Researcher Role and Positionality**

My bias deals with authority figures whom I believe have created policies that do not support K-12 students’ interests and/or needs. This study will involve research pertaining to a subject in which I have a great deal of passion. I am entering the study with a preconceived notion of how things should be, which is in contrast to the current norm. I feel as if, at times, authority figures have completely dismissed suggestions that have been made in the past. I deem them complacent and fearful of ideas that promote positive social change and could encourage an overall improved organizational environment. To mitigate my bias, I will ensure that the knowledge that I develop will be based on careful observation and measurement of the current procedures and I will question if a change would foster improvement.

I am newly employed at South High School as the school’s instrumental music teacher. I began this position at the start of the 2020-2021 academic school year. My job
responsibilities include teaching five academic instrumental music classes to students in grades 7-12 during each school day. I am tasked with utilizing the classes that I teach to develop, build, maintain, and lead an instrumental band program at our school. I am also expected to attend staff meetings, professional development, and weekly teacher-based team meetings in which I am able to collaborate with other stakeholders within my building.

Key stakeholders that I need to go through in order to access data for my action research model include my school building’s leadership team, past and present students, and the parents of students who are under the age of 18. Given my position in the school, I am able to access any existing quantitative data that I will need in order to conduct this action research. If I am initially unable to find needed quantitative data on my own, I can simply request it from leadership in my building. As it pertains to gathering qualitative data, I will seek candidates for interviews and focus groups via email. I will also reach out to interested participants via different social media platforms.

Although I am new in my position, I do have a great deal of influence as it pertains to what I am seeking to accomplish in this study. I was hired for this position largely due to my past accomplishment of building a successful band program at another High School. My current organizational leaders would like for me to institute a band program that obtains a similar level of success. I am able to articulate to building leadership some of the aspects that go into building a successful program which will include an adequate student scheduling process. People in leadership roles in my building value my opinion, and I have been able to establish an extremely positive rapport with
them. In many instances, leadership is extremely supportive and willing to adhere to several of my suggestions, requests, and recommendations.

Conversely, as it pertains to this study, I do not have any influence over anyone that is a part of our building leadership team that may be involved in this study. These stakeholders vastly consist of my supervisors as well as people who were a part of the decision to hire me within the organization. Influence can come into play when it comes to students or former students participating in interviews or focus groups. My influence as an adult and educator can encourage the alteration of student responses because they want to provide the “correct” answer. I will establish a sense of trust and rapport with student participants by ensuring them that there are no “right or wrong” answers and I am seeking for them to answer questions genuinely.

My role in this research will be that of a full participant. I am a fully functioning member of the organization. I will schedule interviews and focus groups with participants. I will also be collecting all of the data. I will approach data collection extremely carefully as I will maintain an awareness of the possibility of bias.

**Ethical and Political Considerations**

All participants will be informed that they will be participating in a research-based project. Each participant’s confidentiality is protected, and they are at no risk of losing employment or any other life-altering circumstances from participating in this research project. The interview questions and conversations within the focus groups will be aligned with non-sensitive topics. Each interviewee will receive and sign a consent form that acknowledges all of this information. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without receiving any negative impact whatsoever.
Pertaining to protected groups, there will also be children under the age of 18 that will be participating in this study. All of these participants must have documented parental consent to participate in this research. For the safety of all participants, each person who participates in this study will be assigned a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes. Participants will be welcome to receive a copy of the findings and results if they like, but full authorship and ownership of this study will belong to me. Participants will also be encouraged to view the transcript of interviews to ensure that their responses were recorded and interpreted correctly. The benefits of people participating in this research far outweigh the risk given that participants are at absolutely no risk from their participation in this study.

**Data Collection Methods**

In regards to my qualitative data collection, I will be conducting interviews and focus groups. I will seek interview candidates who are current students or former students that have experience in both being allowed to elect their elective courses and not being allowed to elect their elective courses. I will be interviewing these participants to research how they perceive their elective classes when they have chosen them versus when they have been assigned to them. The interview process will also address what students consider important or valuable in their elective courses. Participants will be asked to provide detail as it relates to academic and social outcomes in their elective courses when they choose them compared to when they did not choose them. The interview process will be semi-structured as I will be seeking to have a genuine discussion with interview candidates.
I will be interviewing 10 participants and each interview will be 60 minutes in length. Five participants will be current students, and five participants will be former students. I will have one focus group with six participants that will also be 60 minutes in length. The focus group will consist of three current students and three former students all of whom did not participate in individual interviews. Current students who are under the age of 18 will complete an additional document with their guardian acknowledging parental consent to participate in this study. Interview and focus group conversations will be centered around my aforementioned research questions (See Appendix A). For these interviews and focus groups, I will physically be at my home, and participants will physically be at their homes, but we will be able to meet virtually via zoom.

Zoom is a web-based video conferencing tool that allows users to meet online with video. Zoom is the safest and most convenient way to conduct these interviews. In having my interviews on the zoom platform, with the permission of my interviewees and focus group participants, I will be able to video record the interviews. Zoom also has features that will transcribe the interview which will be a necessity for my data collection and analysis. This data will also be stored electronically and password protected.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis will consist of first, cleaning up data transcriptions that are provided by Zoom via closed-captioning. I will analyze the interview data that I gathered by coding the data. I will utilize inductive coding in which I will build my codes from the data as I am analyzing it. I will also be using descriptive codes in which I will summarize what was articulated (Merriam & Grenier 2019). The purpose of coding is to make sense
of the data, divide it into segments, and label those segments. (Creswell & Gutterman 2019).

This coding process will include segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and themes within the data. In coding the data, I will divide it into segments, and label those segments (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019). I will begin by utilizing open coding in which I will analyze the interview transcripts line by line and code by keyword. After open coding, I will transition into axial coding in which I will look for relationships between the open codes that I identify. From there, I will utilize selective coding in which I will create a core category that serves as the central phenomenon that represents all of the other categories.

Trustworthiness

I will validate the findings of all of the data that I collect to ensure trustworthiness through multiple strategies. I will instill a member checking process in which I will present a draft of data findings to select interview candidates and have those candidates determine if my description is accurate. The candidates will clear up any inaccuracies that I initially presented, and I will edit my data accordingly. I will utilize triangulation which means that I will draw on data from multiple sources. The differentiation in interview candidates and focus group participants will allow me to gather data from multiple sources in different positions thus allowing the data collection process to be accurate and credible (Creswell & Gutterman 2019).

Another aspect of trustworthiness that I will implement will be an external audit in which I will obtain the services of an individual who is completely outside of the study to review the different aspects of the data collection (Creswell & Gutterman 2019). This
audit will take place during the data collection process. The auditor will determine if the findings are grounded in data; if the inferences are logical; and if the themes are appropriate. The auditor will also determine if inquiry decision and methodological shifts are justified, and if there is an extensive amount of researcher bias. All in all, I will ensure that this data collection is valid, reliable, dependable, confirmable, credible, and transferable.

**Dependability**

Dependability will be established by ensuring that the findings within this study are consistent and repeatable. Extensive notes will be taken, and all of the details of this study will be reported in great detail if someone else wants to repeat this study. I will ensure that if another researcher were to utilize my data, given a similar context, they would probably arrive at the same results.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability will be established by ensuring that the findings within this study are based on the participants viewpoint and not on my biases. In my findings, I will utilize multiple direct quotes from participants. I will establish an audit trail that describes how I collect, analyze, and interpret the data. I will also create memos to document my thought process throughout the study.

**Credibility**

I will validate the findings of all of the data that I collect to ensure trustworthiness by determining the accuracy and credibility of my findings through member checking. In the member checking process, I will present a draft of data findings to each interview candidate. The candidates will be asked to clear up any inaccuracies that are initially
present, and I would edit my data accordingly. The candidates will determine if my
descriptions were accurate. This member checking process will ensure that I do not report
any data in a misleading fashion, and the findings that I report are the genuine viewpoints
of my interviewees and focus group participants.

Transferability

My data will also be easily transferable. Transferability will be established by
ensuring that the findings within this study consist of detailed accounts that describe the
setting. I will acknowledge any social or cultural issues that the reader or the consumer
should be aware of. I will also ensure that the consumer will be able to judge the
applicability of my findings into their own context.
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Appendix A Informed Consent for Interview Participation

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON - CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE OF STUDY: A Focus on Student Choice in Selecting Elective Courses

You have been invited to be a part of a research study led by Anthony Sewell at the University of Dayton. Your participation is not required. Please read the information below to learn more about the study. Before participating, ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the benefit, purpose, and effectiveness of empowering students to choose their elective courses in comparison to having elective courses chosen for them.

PROCEDURES

If you decide to be a part of this study, please be prepared to participate in a 60-minute interview via Zoom.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

During the course of the interview, we will be discussing personal experiences that you have or had in your elective classes as a high school student.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS

Information gathered throughout this study will be used to gain the perspective and viewpoints of current and former students as it pertains to how they perceived their elective classes.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Interviewees will not be paid for the study

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How important is student choice in scheduling elective courses in high school?

What impact did your elective classes have when you chose it versus when it was assigned to you?

Is there an impact (good or bad) that elective courses have on your everyday life today?

Did elective courses play a role in your academic success when they were chosen for you?

Did elective courses play a role in your social life when you were allowed to select that elective?

Did elective courses that you were able to choose play a role in helping you develop future goals?

CONFIDENTIALITY
I will not reveal who you are in any publications or presentations. Other people may need to see your research records. This is to confirm requirements of the study are met. They will not see your name or have the ability to reveal who you are to others. Your identity will be protected as much as possible. A pseudonym will be assigned to your comments and all demographic data will be recorded at the highest levels possible.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to be in this study. If you do not participate, your relationship with me is not affected. You may stop participating at any time without penalty. You may be stopped from participating if the study is not good for you. You may also be stopped if study instructions are not followed. If you do opt to discontinue participation with this study, any information that you have provided will be removed from the general population and destroyed.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

Please contact one of the investigators listed below if you have any questions about this research.

Anthony Sewell, (Researcher) sewella1@udayton.edu (email)

Dr. Meredith Wronowski, (Faculty Advisor) mwronowski1@udayton.edu (email)

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<td>I have read the information above. I have had a chance to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age and/or the guardian of a participant under the age of 18.</td>
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Name of Participant (please print) _____________________________________________

Address _____________________________________________________________________

Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date_____________________

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

My signature as witness certifies that the Participant signed this consent form in my presence.

Name of Witness (please print) _______________________________________________

Signature of Witness ___________________________ Date_____________________

(Must be same as participant signature date)
CHAPTER TWO: RESULTS OF RESEARCH

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the benefit, purpose, and effectiveness of students being able to choose their elective courses compared to school administrators, counselors, or teachers assigning them to elective courses without their input. My research questions for this qualitative study were centered around gaining insight as to whether or not students have improved academic and social outcomes in their elective courses when they choose them compared to when they are assigned to them. I interviewed 10 participants for 60 minutes each and conducted a focus group with six participants for 60 minutes. Eight of the participants are current students and the other eight are former students. Each participant had experience in both being allowed to elect their elective courses as well as not being allowed to elect their elective courses.

Findings

I was able to fulfill the purpose of this study through the interviews and focus group that I was able to conduct. The findings from those interviews and focus group indicate that there are indeed purposeful benefits of students being able to choose their elective courses as opposed to those elective courses being selected for them. There are also three major themes that suggest that student choice of elective courses enhances academic and social outcomes. One theme that was presented in the data was that students perceive that lack of student choice in selecting elective courses led to bad grades which reflects poor academic performance. Another theme that emerged was that allowing student choice in selecting elective courses encouraged the development of new friendships which reflects positive social outcomes. Engagement in elective courses also
helped students develop goals for their future with directly aligns with the mission and vision of our school district.

**Academic Performance**

I asked each interviewee and focus group participant if elective courses played a role in their academic success when they were chosen for them. Each interviewee reported that they did not experience enhanced academic success when their elective classes were selected for them. Of the 10 interviewees, seven of them associated pre-selected electives with poor academic performance. Five of the six focus group participants also felt as if a lack of student choice in those classes negatively affected academic performance. In my interview with John, he expressed frustration about his enrollment in choir class. John stated:

I remember as a 9th grader, I wanted to take gym class. They told me that gym class was full and I had to take choir because it was the only class that was still open cause I registered late. I hated choir. I can’t sing. I didn’t want to learn to sing. I got an “F” in that class because I never would sing the songs and because I didn’t go to the choir concert.

In my interview with Mary, she also expressed frustration from being placed in an elective class in which she was uncomfortable with. Mary stated:

I remember when I begged them to be in art because I like to draw and paint. They said they would give me art, but they put me in gym class. I didn’t want to be in gym cause I don’t like sports and I didn’t want to have to change clothes in the locker room. I refused to participate and told the teacher that I had too much anxiety to exercise and stuff in front of people. The teacher gave me packets and
busy work to do so I can at least pass the class with a “D.” I kept trying to change that class, but the counselors would not listen to me.

Maria was assigned Spanish as an elective and she had no interest in the course because the course was designed to teach students how to speak Spanish which was already her primary language. Maria’s lack of interest led to a failing grade. Maria stated:

It played a role in my academic failure. They put me in Spanish class. I guess because they knew I spoke Spanish. I didn’t like the class cause the teacher wasn’t even teaching Spanish the right way. I just ended up skipping that class most of the time. I remember I got an “F” in Spanish and people was asking how I fail a Spanish class when I speak Spanish. I told them the same way they failed English class and they speak English. I never wanted to be in that class, they just threw me in there.

In our focus group discussion, Susan also expressed extreme displeasure in having an elective class chosen for her. Susan stated:

I remember when I absolutely despised being forced to take a woodshop class and our school offered a home economics class that I would have loved to take. I didn’t like the teacher and the teacher didn’t like me. I flunked the class because I just didn’t care to try. I had no interest.

The quotes from each interviewee and focus group participant displays that having elective courses chosen for them without their input negatively affected their academic success. John had no interest in choir class; Mary had no interest in gym class; Maria had no interest in Spanish class; and Susan had no interest in woodshop class. Hedges and colleagues (2013), proclaims that a lack of student choice can seriously affect
students’ engagement, effort, and individual achievement. The findings from this study show that each of these students’ engagement, effort, and individual achievement was negatively affected as they were not engaged in the courses that were pre-selected for them. Due to their lack of engagement, they gave little to no effort in those classes. The lack of effort resulted in a lack of individual achievement academically as each student ultimately received unfavorable grades in the pre-selected classes.

New Friendships

I asked each interviewee and focus group participant if elective courses played a role in their social life when they were allowed to select that elective class for themselves. Each interviewee and focus group member reported that they experienced some level of enhanced social skills from their participation in desired elective classes. Of the 10 interviewees, eight of them associated student choice in choosing elective courses with the ability to develop new friendships. 4 of the 6 focus group participants proclaimed that they made new friends in their elective classes in which they were engaged in. Jack stated that he was able to make new friends in his chosen elective class. Jack stated:

I always had pretty good social skills, but I think they got better when I was finally able to take gym class my 10th grade year. I was always really good at the games we played in gym class. The teacher used to have me help kids who didn’t understand how to play or just wasn’t good. I was always pretty good and getting them to understand better and I felt like a good leader when that happened. I got friends today that I met in that gym class. One of them has the same major as me in college now.
Sue bragged that her social life drastically improved when she was able to be in a class that she chose to be in. Sue stated:

When I was allowed to finally get in show choir class, it made my social life so much better. It was a bunch of us in the class and we all enjoyed it and wanted to be there. There were no class clowns. It was only people that, like I said, wanted to be there. I met most of my friends in that class and it was the only class that I was comfortable speaking my mind in.

Tom expressed that he also developed new friendships due to common interests presented in an elective course that he was able to choose. Tom stated:

I always liked to socialize with my friends, but I do believe that when I was able to pick my theater class, it improved my social skills with everybody, not just my friends that was in the class. We got to do projects and things that we would never do in a regular class like Math or English. When we used to practice for the school play, everybody had so much fun acting out our parts. I really loved that class because a lot of us were totally different people from totally different cultures, but none of that mattered in theater class. We were all friends, and we still keep in touch today.

Lisa also exclaimed about the number of friendships that she was able to develop strictly because of student choice. Lisa stated:

If it wasn’t for band class, I would not have any friends. I met all of my friends in band class and we will always be close friends. I think we just have a special bond from playing music together that a lot of other people would not understand. I
used to be so shy, but now I am very comfortable playing my instrument and having fun making music with my friends.

Rambo (2011) proclaimed that electives can provide opportunities to demonstrate their value to their classmates. The findings of this study show that students were able to recognize those opportunities to be of value, which encouraged student interaction and created lasting friendships. The quotes from these interviewees and focus group participants entail that they were able to improve upon social skills as a result of being able to choose elective courses in which they were engaged in. Jack, Sue, Tom, and Lisa were all able to gain friendships through positive interactions with other students with similar interests. They were able to obtain those social interactions through student choice and engagement in their elective courses.

**Future Goals**

I asked each interviewee if elective courses in which they were able to select played a role in helping them develop future goals. Each interviewee reported that elective courses did indeed play a role in helping them develop future goals. Interviewees associated student choice with the development of future goals.

Michael was a good high school athlete, and his only aspiration was to be a professional athlete. Michael attributed the expansion of his goals to his physical education teacher. In my interview with Michael, he stated:

I played three sports in high school. The only thing I ever wanted to do was go to the NBA or the NFL. I was able to take gym one and gym two. In those classes, coach (physical education teacher) taught me that I need to have a backup plan. Even though I am a good high school athlete, it is a good chance I will not go pro,
and I need to have that backup plan. Even if I can’t play in the pros, I want to be involved with sports. After I do my gen ed courses, I am transferring schools so I can major in sports medicine. I want to be a trainer for pro athletes. It will have me involved in sports and pro athletics even though I’m not actually playing.

Jennifer was considering dropping out of school before she got into her art class. Jennifer now aspires to be an artist as a result of being allowed to choose art class. In our interview Jennifer stated:

Before I got into that art class, I was considering dropping out of school. Even though I like making good grades, I didn’t really like school that much. At first, I was only going to school because I wanted to be the 1st one in my family to finish school. Plus, everybody I know that dropped out was doing bad in their life or going to jail. I just didn’t want to end up like them. When I got in the art class, it made me actually want to go to college and be an art major. One day, I want to be able to paint and sculpt things that people will pay a lot of money for. I think I’m good enough because that class gives me the confidence.

Emily initially did not have any college aspirations, but she attributes her current enrollment in a university to her participation in her high school elective course that she chose to partake in. Her future goals are also aligned with aspects of that elective class. Emily stated:

When I first went to high school, I didn’t care about or think about going to college. When I had a bunch of classes that I really didn’t like, I just wanted to finish high school and never go to school again. But when I got into that drama class, that is what made me want to go to college. I think everybody from my
drama class went to college. I am majoring in psychology and I really like it a lot, but I do think that after I get this degree, I want to become an actress. I know if it doesn’t work, I can fall back on my degree, but I want to go to Hollywood and see what I can do.

Mark acknowledged that his chosen elective is a major contributing factor to his career choice. Mark attributes his entire career to his participation in elective courses.

Mark stated:

I have always had a passion for fixing things that were broken. Up until 11th grade, I couldn’t stand any elective class that they forced me to take. In my 11th and 12th grade year, I was fortunate enough to be able to choose auto tech as my elective class, and the rest is history. I love being an automotive mechanic and it all started with that class I took in 11th grade. That class gave me a reason to come to school because I had very little interest in other classes. I went on to trade school to become a certified mechanic and here I am today. I will never forget that auto tech class in high school.

The quotes from each interviewee and focus group participant demonstrates a strong connection between elective courses and students developing future goals.

Michael, Jennifer, Emily, and Mark were not strongly interested in education beyond high school prior to selecting their elective courses. Choosing their elective courses and being engaged in those courses assisted those students in college aspirations and the development of goals for their future success. Futterman (2016) revealed that students are more likely to graduate from college with a degree that relates to a course they took as an elective in high school. Of the 16 participants in this study, 13 of them have demonstrated
past, present, or future interest in collegiate or trade school majors that align with the elective courses that they were able to choose.

**Findings Summary**

The findings indicate that students being able to choose their own elective courses is extremely valuable as it pertains to academic performance, positive social skills, and developing goals for future success. Situations in which electives are chosen for students without their input can be deemed harmful and fail to align with the purpose, expectations, mission, and vision of most school districts. Four generations, which include the baby boomer generation, generation X, generation Y, and generation Z, were represented in this study. Participants from each generation were all in agreement that being able to choose elective courses is much more worthwhile than situations in which an administrator or counselor chooses those classes for the student. Each participant demonstrated credibility and trustworthiness in their response to interview and focus group questions.

**Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Participants in this study ranged from ages 16 to 65. Some participants were current high school students and some were college students. Other participants were adults who did not finish high school, adults who are currently in the workforce, and two adults who are retired. The differentiation in interview candidates and focus group participants allowed me to gather data from multiple sources who are in different positions and stages in their lives. In drawing data from this variety of sources I was able to utilize triangulation which allowed the data collection process to be accurate and credible (Creswell & Gutterman 2019).
The data collected in this phenomenological study consisted exclusively of responses to questions from interview and focus group participants. All questions were designed to understand the essence of participation in elective classes and its impact on current and former high school students. To ensure that this data collection is credible, trustworthy, and reflects the exact viewpoint of participants, I implemented a member checking process in which each participant was presented with a draft of data findings and asked to determine if my description is accurate. The candidates were asked to point out any inaccuracies that are present within the draft. If inaccuracies or misconceptions were present, I would edit my data to reflect the exact viewpoint of the participant. Every participant was satisfied and acknowledged that the initial data was accurate.

After completing a member checking process with each participant and being able to present a final draft of findings, I had an external audit performed in which a peer, who has no affiliation with the study, reviewed the different aspects of the data collection. The peer reviewer thoroughly examined my data draft for any inaccuracy that could diminish the credibility and trustworthiness of my data. This external audit concluded that my findings were grounded in data, credible, and trustworthy. The inferences were logical; and the themes were appropriate. This external audit along with member checking and triangulation has ensured that the findings within this data collection is credible and trustworthy.

**Limitations**

Limitation of my findings include a small sample size of participants and only one school community being represented. Of the small sample size, some of the participants are no longer in high school and have provided answers to research questions
based upon reflections of their memories. Participants were selected in a manner in which contrasting genders, age groups, and backgrounds were represented in the study.

Although these limitations are present, the purpose of this research is to foster improvement specifically within my school/district. The findings reported may not be applicable to some other school districts; however, the findings that are reported do apply to the Columbus City School district and would hold merit in any school district that presents similar inequities as it pertains to scheduling students in elective classes. As the instrumental music teacher in my school building, I have developed an action plan that puts a focus on creating a policy change that will allow students to choose their preferred elective classes.

**Action Plan**

My action plan involves utilizing the data that I have collected in conjunction with my duties as the school’s instrumental music teacher to foster a policy change. I have begun the implementation of an afterschool and summer instrumental music program that consists of students who are thoroughly engaged in instrumental music. I am monitoring the interactions within the program to see if the themes that were presented within my research are present within the program. As indicated in my findings, having students who are participating in this program by their own choosing should foster improved academic performance, the blossoming of new friendships, and the development of future goals. The program is only in its early stages, and I am already experiencing these developments from the participating students. This action plan will prove to be worthwhile for instrumental students and these students will remain together with instrumental music as a chosen elective class during following academic school
years. The overarching goal of this action plan is to demonstrate that student choice is the reason for its success and it should encourage a policy change to allow student choice in all elective course offerings.

**Rationale**

The Columbus City School district has a current procedure that does not always afford our students the opportunity to select their elective classes. Our school district is an urban school district which serves a significant number of students who are racially minoritized and marginalized because of a history of racism and economic depression in their community (Upgraded Home 2021). These students already have significant opportunity gaps due to this marginalization and not allowing them to choose courses that they feel connected to and passionate about is just one more opportunity gap that is being created by the school and district. The current scheduling policy presents an equity issue as several surrounding suburban school districts are able to provide enrichment opportunities for their children to pursue their passions outside of school and act as powerful advocates for their children's choices of courses within their schools. However, Columbus City families do not have access to the resources to provide the same level of enrichment outside of school and do not have the same social capital to feel comfortable advocating for their children inside the school.

**Description**

In June of 2021, as the newly hired instrumental music teacher, I began to establish an instrumental music program that focuses on continuous improvement of the current music program. The ultimate goals of the program align with students becoming more adept musicians, improving their professionalism, and ultimately enrolling in
postsecondary music programs. This plan is already in progress and was created from scratch as there was not an existing instrumental music program in place prior to my arrival in 2020. Based upon my research findings and with regards to the encouragement of implementing student choice in the selection of activities, no student will be mandated to participate in this program, and students are welcome to discontinue their participation at any time. The program will teach students about how committing to the band program connects to them being able to attend college via band scholarship. Students will learn that constant unceasing care, hard work, and dedication to the program will enhance life skills such as timeliness, leadership, and teamwork. Furthermore, students are able to perform at all of our high school football games as well as other events that will take place both in state and out of state.

Strategies to maintain engagement will consist of teaching students how to play and perform music that they enjoy listening to and is culturally relevant. The program will take place at the school, and we will utilize multiple areas of the school for different activities. We will utilize the band room to learn how to read and play a varied repertoire of music. We will utilize the school’s gym and parking lot to practice marching band conditioning. We will also utilize our school’s football stadium to practice playing and performing music in an outdoor setting.

Students will not have to pay any out-of-pocket costs to participate in the band program. All materials including instruments, sheet music, and performance uniforms will be provided for every participating student. Upon receiving the position, I received a $25,000 grant to repair several instruments within the school that had not been played for numerous years. This money was also utilized to buy uniforms and any other necessities
needed so that students could participate without having to pay. This money came from a non-profit group within the community who wanted to support once gaining an awareness of my vision. There are now enough materials to accommodate approximately 240 students. Between the five sections of band classes that I teach during the school day, I have a total of 180 students who are currently learning band fundamentals. This means that there is more than enough availability for every student that I teach to participate in this program. The program meets after academic school hours therefore students who are not enrolled in one of my instrumental music classes during the academic school day will still be able to participate in the program. I will take special notes as it pertains to students who are participating and engaged in the program but not currently enrolled in band class during the school day as this is the ultimate change that I am seeking.

**Desired Objectives**

The initial goals and objectives of the band program are:

1. To institute a band program in which 90% of the band members arrive on time to 90% of all scheduled after school and summer band rehearsals.

2. To ensure that 100% of students who commit to the band program and rehearsals will be offered college and university scholarships upon their completion of high school.

3. To ensure that 100% of participants learn the necessary skills to perform with the band at various events.

4. To encourage a policy change that allows students to elect elective courses when creating an academic school schedule.
**Timeline**

The after-school program began on Monday, April 26, 2021 from 2:45 until 4:30 on Tuesdays and Fridays. On Monday June 7, 2021, when the academic school year concluded, the program transitioned into a summer band program that met Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 11:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. With the beginning of the 2021 academic school year, I have been able to expand the program by adding new students. Currently, the group consists of 64 students, and each student has two days out of the week in which they rehearse afterschool from 2:45 until 4:30. This schedule will remain intact until the academic year ends in June and will once again transition to a summer program. The program will be continuous and will not end.

**Outcomes**

Pertaining to the state of the band program and student needs, upon my arrival, students did not have after school or summer band rehearsals nor have any students attended a college or university on a band scholarship in recent history. Students did not have a genuine understanding of the benefits of committing to a high school band program. Students who may have given up on attending a major college or university due to the price of attending these institutions are not aware that collegiate band scholarships are available. Obtaining this knowledge can foster students to be intrinsically motivated to be successful in band as it can be a gateway to their future. Ryan & Deci (2020) states that intrinsic motivation encourages students to have a deeper approach to learning which encourages college preparedness.

This program will be focused on continuous improvement of the current music program. Outcomes will be measured by the number of students who are participating
and the number of students who are attending colleges and universities as a result of their participation. Students have not had a program of this magnitude in recent history, and I anticipate that many more students will participate in the program than have in the past. I also anticipate that the program will achieve the desired outcome of having students attend post-secondary institutions via band scholarship. My plan is to utilize the success of this band program to advocate for a change in policy in regards to scheduling students in elective courses.

As the program continues to grow and maintain success, I will be able to request a policy change in which all students who have participated in this program be allowed to choose to be in band class during the academic year. I will also be able to use the success of the band program to advocate for a revised policy which allows all students to choose all of their elective courses. I will argue that the other elective course offerings in our building can maintain similar success if the students that are enrolled in those courses are engaged in the learnings due to student choice. I will also encourage other elective program educators to implement similar afterschool and/or summer programs that will encourage enhanced success within their respective crafts. Ultimately, this could create a policy change in which student choice is implemented in all elective course selections.

The logic model below provides detailed information as it relates to the objectives and structure of the band program’s implementation:

(See figure 1)
## Logic Model for South High School Instrumental Music Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Outputs Activities</th>
<th>Outputs Participation</th>
<th>Outcomes -- Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilities to teach band students</td>
<td>Teach students how to read music through the playing of an instrument.</td>
<td>Teacher/ Support Staff</td>
<td>Students learn the fundamentals of playing an instrument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Bus</td>
<td>Teach students concepts of working together to properly perform music.</td>
<td>Teacher/ Support Staff</td>
<td>Students gain an understanding of their individual part and if it is dominant or secondary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band Instruments</td>
<td>Encourage collaboration between a diverse group of students with common goals.</td>
<td>Teacher/ Support Staff</td>
<td>Students working together to transfer knowledge and learn new music without adult help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Staff</td>
<td>Implement life lessons such as timeliness and commitment.</td>
<td>Teacher/ Support Staff</td>
<td>Students arrive to rehearsals with minimum tardiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interest</td>
<td>Conduct performance assessments via computer technology</td>
<td>Teacher/ Support Staff</td>
<td>Students becoming familiar with performance assessment technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students making improvements based upon feedback provided from technology assessment component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students are able to perform music for an audience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assumptions**
Students have all of their basic needs met and are not currently experiencing any mental health issues.

**External Factors**
Students may be excluded from rehearsal if they have tutoring, after school employment, or other reasonable conflict.
References


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iree.2014.05.003


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860

CHAPTER THREE: DESCRIPTION OF ACTION/INTERVENTION/CHANGE PROCESS

Introduction

I have communicated, with policymakers in our school building, my desire to implement a scheduling policy change in which students are allowed to choose their elective course options. While my overarching goal pertains to all elective course offerings, my expertise and role within the school is connected to instrumental music. Based upon my job position as an instrumental music teacher, my goal is to foster the policy change for all elective courses through an action plan that uplifts the instrumental music program. The program consists of only students who are engaged in instrumental music and have chosen to participate in the program. I am hoping to achieve my overarching goal by demonstrating that the upcoming success of the instrumental music program can be attributed to student choice and that student choice should become a universal policy as it pertains to scheduling all elective courses. This action plan consists of four main objectives that will remain consistent throughout the existence of South High School’s instrumental music program. The objectives are initially designed to encourage a policy change that allows students to choose their elective courses and these objectives will remain intact after a policy change has occurred. These objectives are as follows:

1. To provide opportunities for students with opportunity gaps through instrumental music.

2. To ensure that students have the requisite skills to receive college and university instrumental music scholarships from multiple higher education institutions.
3. To institute a band program in which students learn and perform culturally relevant instrumental music as well as a varied repertoire of music.

4. To foster important everyday life lessons such as timeliness and commitment.

**Tasks**

The first objective has been achieved by engaging interested students and informing them, in various manners of communication, that there are several opportunities that will be available for them due to their committed participation in the program. The second objective has been achieved by structuring rehearsals in a sequential manner in which students are gradually enhancing their individual skillsets in performing on their instruments. The content that is being learned consists of the same fundamentals that are required when auditioning for college and university instrumental music scholarships. Performance selections are culturally relevant to participating students, and with multiple cultures being represented by program participants, it will create a varied repertoire of music that our group will be able to perform. This will also provide students the opportunity to learn about cultural aspects that differ from their own. Finally, important everyday life lessons such as timeliness and commitment are being taught to students within the program. There are clear and concise arrival times, break times, and departure times that students will need to adhere to, and enforced consequences for not adhering to scheduled timeframes will be implemented as well.

**Participants**

Any student who attends South High School, engaged in instrumental music, and intrigued by the opportunities available through instrumental music is welcome to
participate in the program. Participants can expect to gain a vast amount of insight as it pertains to receiving scholarships and performing a variety of musical pieces. All student participants will commit to rehearsal dates and times. I will be participating as the designer of the program and the leader who is providing the teaching, instruction, and tasks. Arrival and dismissal times are mandatory for every participant and I will lead by example by being present 30 minutes before the students’ scheduled arrival time.

**Timeframe/Location/Resources**

This program is currently in its early implementation stages and program participants meet Monday through Friday after school until 5:00 p.m. Once the academic year ends, activities will continue through a summer program that meets Monday through Friday from 11:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. Rehearsals are at our school facilities, and different areas of the school are utilized for different purposes. For example, we will learn to read and notate music in the band room, and we will utilize the school’s parking lot and football field to learn marching band techniques. Everything that each student needs to be a part of the program is provided at no cost to the student. Students will be provided with sheet music that guides them in learning how to read music, and each student is provided with an instrument and supplies to care for their instrument. The table below outlines the structure of the implementation of the action plan:

(See Figure 2)
**Figure 2**

**Action Plan Implementation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Tasks (How)</th>
<th>Person(s) (Who)</th>
<th>Time (When)</th>
<th>Location (Where)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide opportunities for students with opportunity gaps through instrumental music.</td>
<td>Implement an instrumental music program geared towards providing an awareness of those opportunities</td>
<td>People who will benefit will be students as well as their parents or caregivers.</td>
<td>Program is currently in existence and meets daily after school until 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Most rehearsals take place in the band room, but we also utilize other facilities within our school.</td>
<td>Each student is provided with an instrument and supplies to care for their instrument.</td>
<td>Everything that a student needs to be a part of the program is provided at no cost to the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will be able to receive college and university scholarships from multiple higher education institutions</td>
<td>Students will learn the necessary skills needed to be able to audition to be a part of college and university band programs.</td>
<td>Any student who is in the program will have this opportunity, and scholarships can be full scholarships if a certain ability level is demonstrated.</td>
<td>Auditions can take place in our school building, at the university’s facilities, or in a Zoom session.</td>
<td>Students will need their instrument, audition sheet music, and access to audition location.</td>
<td>Funds will only be needed if the student is traveling to the college or university campus for auditions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To institute a band program in which students learn and perform the culturally relevant instrumental music as well as a varied repertoire of music.</td>
<td>Make playing music enjoyable by incorporating song selections of music that students currently enjoy listening to.</td>
<td>Any student who is in the program will have this opportunity, and it will also foster music appreciation through performance.</td>
<td>Music learning will take place in the band room and performed at various venues.</td>
<td>Students will be provided with sheet music that guides them in learning how to read music.</td>
<td>Sheet music will be arranged by me as the instructor and no funds are necessary.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To foster important everyday life lessons such as timeliness and commitment.</td>
<td>Provide clear and concise arrival times and enforce consequences for not adhering to scheduled timeframes.</td>
<td>Arrival and dismissal times are for every participant and will be led by example by the teacher being present 30 minutes early.</td>
<td>After school rehearsals will begin promptly at 2:45 p.m. and end no later than 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Meeting locations within the school facilities will be communicated with students in advanced,</td>
<td>Various communication platforms such as email, flyers, and phone dialers.</td>
<td>There is no cost for the resources needed to ensure students maintain timeliness and commitment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stakeholders

In order to continue to implement this action plan, I provided a rationale for a variety of stakeholders that need to be actively engaged and willing to support my action plan. Internal stakeholders who are engaged in this process include the students and me as the current music teacher. These are the stakeholders who are directly participating in the program as I will be teaching strategies and concepts to students who will be executing and performing those teachings. External stakeholders who are vital to this program are the parents or caregivers of music students, the principal, and the surrounding community. These external stakeholders are of extreme importance as being able to obtain support and engagement from these stakeholders will prove to be vital to the success of the action plan.

Students as Stakeholders

While establishing support from a variety of external stakeholder groups has been important, the students are the most important stakeholder as they are the group of people who are learning and benefiting from the teachings within the action plan. With that being stated, the beginnings of this action plan consisted of informing the entire student body of the plan and sparking the engagement of interested students. The program was mentioned each day to the entire student body during morning and afternoon announcements, and all interested students were encouraged to attend an interest meeting in order to gain additional information. Students were informed about the program, and the details were sent to parents via newsletters, flyers, phone dialers, and emails. Having the support of parents and/or caregivers is also a critical factor in the success of this action plan.
Parents as Stakeholders

Parents and caregivers are external stakeholders who are extremely important in a multitude of facets. First, this group of stakeholders allow their children to participate in the aforementioned program. Secondly, many parents’ engagement and support consist of them being stretched for time, energy, and resources (Fong Yit 2017). Some parents and caregivers have to make adjustments to provide transportation for their children from rehearsals and performances. In students having such admiration for instrumental music, it will encourage the parents and caregivers to also gain an improved awareness of the benefits that instrumental music students are receiving. Parents will be thoroughly informed about the objectives of the program in a variety of manners, and I anticipate that they will become increasingly engaged as they see the results coming into fruition.

The Principal as a Stakeholder

Another external stakeholder that holds extreme value to my action plan is the school building’s principal. Having the support of the principal is a necessity as the principal serves as the supervisor of the school building and a person who has the power to terminate the program. The principal also has influence or control over the building’s master schedule and creates the vision for elective education in conjunction with core academic course work. Furthermore, the principal maintains a focus on creating a positive school culture by engaging in activities that promote student growth (Habegger 2008). The principal has also demonstrated support for my overarching goal of student choice in elective scheduling, and has informed me that my program can play a role in future policy adjustments. A large part of me being hired for this position was the principal’s knowledge of collegiate scholarships through instrumental music in
conjunction with previous success that I had promoting instrumental music as a means to fulfill existing opportunity gaps. My principal shares my vision for our instrumental music program and is thoroughly engaged. In an effort to mitigate some of the transportation issues with transporting students to and from rehearsals, our principal has funded an activity bus which will transport students to and from instrumental music practices if parents are unable or too inconvenienced.

*The Community as Stakeholders*

Community engagement will have an extremely important role in the success of the instrumental music program. As the designer of the program, it will be my responsibility to inform the program design, implement the program’s strategies, and foster the much-needed community engagement. Currently, my focus on community engagement is centered around bringing an awareness of the role that instrumental music can play in the future of the students that we educate within our educational facility. I want to engage the community by ensuring that they have a keen awareness of the goals and objectives of the instrumental music program. In obtaining this information about the relevance of the program, the goal is for the community to support the program through the understanding of the program’s vision and its worth (Giancola 2021).

I strive to ensure that my community engagement approach is an approach that has a high level of cultural competency. Many of the people that I communicate with within my school’s community have varying beliefs, values, social habits, and cultural ideals. Lindsey and colleagues (2019) point out that the family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children. Cultural values and norms are instilled in young people by their family well before they enter a school.
building. As a band director and educator that encounters students of different cultural values, a large part of my community engagement consists of students and their families having a strong voice and playing a major role in their instrumental music educational experience. In implementing this communication strategy, I have been able to learn and apply best practices in which all students involved have equitable opportunities to be successful.

Mc Alister (2013) suggests that community engagement in the arts has improved family engagement and increased student well-being and achievement. The community can offer a wide range of resources that are valuable to students who are currently lacking some resources. The local business community can offer wide-ranging support related to funding and additional scholarships opportunities. As mentioned previously, our students are able to participate in the band program at no cost largely due to a non-profit organization within the community who was engaged by my vision for the program. The goals of this action plan will be clearly communicated with stakeholders within the community outside of students’ parents and caregivers. Stakeholders within the community who could provide additional support to this program will begin to receive communication related to the program’s vision via emails, flyers, and newsletters. I will seek effective communication and collaborative opportunities with stakeholders within the community.

**Anticipated Outcomes**

Through engaging multiple stakeholder groups, I anticipate implementing an extremely successful program in which students are learning life skills, applying musical knowledge, and being offered collegiate scholarships. I will be able to present data that
details the success of this program to my target audience and stakeholders. It will be presented in school newsletters, discussed at school board meetings, and featured on the school district website. The principal will be able to access documentation that details each participant’s growth or regression as it relates to their attendance and musical abilities. Parents and caregivers will be able to access this information as well as it relates to their student. As it pertains to the overarching goal of encouraging a policy change, policymakers within our school building will be encouraged to obtain an awareness of this data, gain a recognition of its worth, and implement a policy change that allows student choice in the selection of elective courses.

Currently, none of our former students attend a college or university via instrumental music scholarship. This action plan consists of fostering a change in which students are engaged in instrumental music activities and become recipients of college and university band scholarships. The key factor for the success of this program will be that it specifically caters to students who are engaged in instrumental music and that all participants will attend all scheduled band rehearsals. My anticipated outcome is that these goals will be achieved due to the engagement of all of the internal stakeholders. I will continue to communicate my goal of fostering a policy change, and I will utilize the ongoing level of engagement that students are presenting as evidence that a policy change would allow this level of engagement to continue throughout the course of an academic school day. As the program organizer, I will ensure that the engagement needs to be maintained by all participants and assessed. I will take several measures in analyzing the program’s implementation to ensure that the goals and objectives of this action plan are being consistently satisfied.
Analysis of Implementation

The progress of the action plan will be determined upon data collection that will align with key questions that will decipher if the program can be deemed successful and beneficial for the students who are participating in it. Those key questions are as follows:

1. Are students reporting to rehearsals each day and actively engaged in activities?
2. Are students progressing and gaining the requisite skills to be offered a band scholarship?
3. Will the whole group be able to perform a varied repertoire of music at multiple events?

In order to gather data that answers the question of students reporting to rehearsals and actively engaging in activities, an attendance log is filled out each day in order to detail the number of students who are reporting each day.

Student Engagement Survey

To assess engagement, students will complete a weekly student engagement assessment form. The assessment choices will be strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. Each example on the survey will be a statement related to engagement, and each student will choose the response that best coincides with their personal feelings. I will then analyze the student engagement assessment data that I gather by examining descriptive statistics. In this examination process, my objective is to make sense of the data, divide it into segments, and label those segments (Creswell & Guterman 2019). After the examination process, categories that consist of the median and mode measures of central tendency will be created. I anticipate for results of the
student engagement assessment data to coincide with students being highly engaged in the program. I believe that this will be the case because no student was mandated to participate, and only students who had initial interest will be participating.

**Student Engagement Survey Validity**

The goal of the student engagement assessment form is to measure the point of view of band students as it pertains to their interest in the program. This assessment scale has construct validity as the statements on it are designed to measure students’ level of engagement (Giancola 2021.) This assessment also measures students’ intrinsic motivation to be prompt for band rehearsals. Each statement is related to how well the student is enjoying participating in the program. There will also be predictive validity as I will check the correlation of students’ responses to this survey and anecdotal documents that I will keep regarding students’ level of participation, commentary, and body language (Giancola 2021). Students will be well aware of the fact that there are no right or wrong answers, and that they are not receiving a letter grade for completing the student engagement assessment form.

**Student Engagement Survey Reliability**

I anticipate that the student engagement assessment will also be reliable. Each statement is focused on the same topic of engagement, and measures similar things across different students. In having clearly defined categories and ranking scales, each student engagement survey will be consistently scored in the exact same manner. I will also determine Cronbach’s alpha in order to assess the internal consistency of the survey items and determine if any items are not functioning well (Giancola 2021). These student engagement surveys will be filled out on a weekly basis in order to determine if there has
been a change or evolution in the viewpoint of students. Student engagement will be the key to the success of this action plan.

*Student Engagement Survey Considerations*

Like other assessments that are repeated measures, students’ answers can be influenced by previous questions answered in the assessment. Some students might feel the need to choose a certain answer even if that answer does not best coincide with their actual viewpoint. LaMarca (2011) points out that students might heavily choose agree and disagree options in making an effort to avoid negative implications that could be associated with the extreme options even if the extreme options are the most accurate. To address these considerations, students will be informed that the assessment does not count for a letter grade, and there are no wrong answers. Also, students will be told to answer questions as truthfully as possible and not put their name on the assessment to enhance confidentiality. I anticipate for results of the data to show that students are highly engaged in the program due to the fact that no student was mandated to participate, and only students who had initial interest will be participating.

*Music Skills and Musicianship Assessment*

Given the heavy weight placed on assessment scores by my school building and district, my action plan also involves providing assessment evidence that demonstrates student success in music assessments. Developing these assessments and gathering student data will be vital as students are preparing to audition for band scholarships. Walls and colleagues (2013) point out that individual assessment of band students is key to developing a strong program with independently functioning musicians. Students will need to have an awareness of their individual strengths and weaknesses in order to know
the best way to approach future individual practice. Knowing that regularly assessing individual students can take an immense amount of time, one of the key recommendations made by Russell (2014) was to find an efficient assessment method that had a minimal impact on the teacher’s workload. *Smart Music* is one type of assessment that I will utilize within the action plan.

*Smart Music* is a computer software program with recording technology that has a powerful assessment component that I will utilize for data collection (Chiodo 2001.) This software will allow me to gather data that answer the questions related to students progressing and gaining the requisite skills to be offered a band scholarship. The software will be programmed to listen to the performer play their instrument and provide feedback based on the musical elements needed to be offered a band scholarship. I will be able to provide strategies for improvement on any negative feedback from the software. *Smart Music* can also be programmed to assess the full group as we play various selections of music.

Upon completion of the music selection, the computer displays the music notation using green, red or black notes. Green notes indicate performance of the correct note that was played at the correct time. A red note indicates that either a wrong note or rhythm was played. Black notes indicate the part was not attempted at all. In addition to this feedback, percentage scoring of the music selection administered is also possible. The percentage score indicates the number of correct notes performed in comparison to the total number of possible notes that should have been performed.

Chiodo (2001) suggested that recording technology through *Smart Music* could enable individual assessment that could be utilized by students outside of class.
Anecdotal evidence from band directors and students suggests that *Smart Music* saves time and fosters the motivation that students need to be successful (Criswell et al., 2003). Several practical assessments can be created on *Smart Music* software and issued to instrumental music students. These practical assessments will allow me to assess the practical skills of students as it pertains to their performance on their instrument. *Smart Music* also has a grade book that consists of a database of links to each individual student’s *Smart Music* assessment recordings and their associated grades.

There have been many studies conducted that suggest that band programs use *Smart Music* for individual performance and assessment practice. A survey of 22 Kansas music teachers indicated that their students use *Smart Music* to practice, perform, and take assessments (Agnew 2003). Lee (2022) conducted a study with 29 students in which half of the students were in a traditional beginning band class and did not use *Smart Music*. The other half were in a class that used *Smart Music* accompaniments during whole class rehearsal and small group practice. Lee found no statistical differences in the performance of middle school students whose band instruction was supplemented with *Smart Music*.

Buck (2008) conducted a study in which 46 middle school band students participated in an experimental study with *Smart Music*. In this study, the teacher used *Smart Music's* features interactively in a series of five pullout music lessons. The average scores were significantly higher for students whose instruction included *Smart Music* assessment. 77% of students felt that their musicianship improved due to the use of *Smart Music*, and 23% felt they their musicianship remained the same. No students felt as if their ability had declined due to the usage of *Smart Music* (Buck 2008). This research
indicates that the use of *Smart Music* software may either be equal to traditional methods or it can enhance student performance. An extremely important factor of assessment via *Smart Music* is that students have shown positive attitudes toward the use of the software. *Smart Music* assessments can provide students with the intrinsic motivation that they need to be successful.

**Smart Music Validity**

The *Smart Music* software has content validity as it assesses skills that are aligned with the program’s music instruction. With this software program, the goal is to measure students’ current level of ability when it comes to performing on their musical instrument. This *Smart Music* program will entail predictive validity as the performance on the assessment will also measure students’ readiness to successfully audition for college and university scholarships (Giancola 2021). The feedback that will be provided to students by *Smart Music* can be linked to the feedback in which they will receive from a live person giving them an audition opportunity. Students who have subpar performances will be offered strategies for improvement.

**Smart Music Reliability**

This *Smart Music* software is also likely to be reliable. The assessment is measuring similar things across different student performers. It consists of student performers playing a musical instrument. After performing, students will receive feedback related to the performance from the technology. The feedback provided will be consistent and distributed in the exact same manner (Giancola 2021). As a type of interrater reliability, I will also assess the students’ skills myself and compare my assessment with that of the *Smart Music* assessment.
**Anticipated Outcomes**

Based on students naturally progressing at different levels, I believe that the *Smart Music* data will vary. The technology will provide positive feedback as well as suggestions for improvement when applicable. All students who initially receive negative feedback from *Smart Music* will work diligently and make the necessary improvements to be offered college scholarships. This is because all students are engaged in what they are doing and will desire to improve upon any weaknesses. While each individual will have personal feedback from *Smart Music* assessments, I will analyze *Smart Music* data based on common errors among the group of students. This will allow for me to plan group instruction for the upcoming days. I will measure growth or success towards my identified learning objectives by administering the same assessment on a later date after I have retaught content in various manners. All of the hard work will pay off and our group will indeed be able to perform a varied repertoire of music at multiple events as indicated in the initial goals and objectives. This *Smart Music* software will provide a positive organizational change and the intrinsic motivation component aligns with my leadership practice.

**Analysis of Organizational Change & Leadership Practice**

My scholar identity directly aligns with instilling intrinsic motivation in my students. Intrinsic motivation is especially appealing because it translates into desirable behaviors such as choosing challenging tasks, exerting effort, and persistence (Ferrer-Caja & Weiss 2002). My goal is to foster intrinsic motivation in students by providing them with an awareness of the fact that committing to high school band rehearsals and developing skills playing a musical instrument can lead to their college expenses being
paid for via band scholarship. It will also leave students with valuable lessons that will remain with them in their adult future. In providing this knowledge to students, I am able to grasp their attention and spark them to become intrinsically motivated to be successful in band as it can be a gateway to their future.

Intrinsic motivation through band can also be a key component as it pertains to my school and school district’s goal of academic motivation and achievement. Students also need to be intrinsically motivated to be successful in academic disciplines that are outside of the band realm. To foster additional intrinsic motivation, students will also be informed that in order to receive a band scholarship, they have to be accepted into their desired colleges and universities. These educational institutions will only accept students into their higher education programs if students have demonstrated academic success in previously completed academic courses. This will present a strong intrinsic motivation correlation between band success and academic success. I will instill intrinsic motivation in my students through the theory of transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership is a leadership style in which leaders encourage, inspire, and motivate followers to innovate and create change that will help grow and shape the future success of the organization (Northouse 2019). As the name indicates, transformational leadership consists of a process that transforms people. It involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them (Northouse 2019). Hall and colleagues (2019) define transformational leadership as the ability to get people to want to change, improve, and be led. Northouse (2019) defines transformational leadership as the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation
and morality in both the leader and the follower. With its emphasis on intrinsic motivation, transformational leadership represents a more appealing view in comparison to a transactional approach (Bass & Riggio 2014). While intrinsic motivation is an essential component of transformational leadership, there are other components of this leadership style that is also of vast importance.

Another important component of transformational leadership is follower development which may appeal to followers as it relates to their need of inspiration and empowerment. Kelly (2021) points out that a transformative process for followers will be concerned with their emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. Lai and colleagues (2020) suggest that followers who are inspired by transformational leadership are more likely to immerse themselves in the work, and, in turn, this is likely to result in better task performance and helping behaviors. On the other hand, Moradi and colleagues (2016) acknowledges that perception of discrimination and injustice will demoralize and demotivate followers which can decrease the productivity of their performances.

Transformational leadership is characterized by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Hall et al., 2019). Idealized influence describes leaders who are exemplary role models for followers. Leaders with idealized influence can be trusted and respected by followers to make good decisions for the organization. Inspirational motivation describes leaders who motivate followers to commit to the vision of the organization. Leaders with inspirational motivation encourage team spirit and working towards the goals of the organization. Intellectual stimulation describes leaders who encourage innovation and creativity through challenging the normal beliefs or views of a group. Leaders with intellectual
stimulation promote critical thinking and problem-solving to make the organization better. Individual consideration describes leaders who act as coaches and advisors to the followers. Leaders with individual consideration encourage followers to reach goals that help both the followers as well as the organization (Hall et al., 2019).

Transformational leadership is an ideal leadership style as it relates to developing a successful instrumental music program. The intrinsic motivation component allows band students to maintain an awareness of the benefits of participating in a band program. The followership development component ensures each band student is highly-educated and prepared to attend college. Transformational leadership also allows band students to demonstrate more of who they are as people to prospective colleges and universities. In the case of the students that I educate, it shows that although they are urban students who may have faced opportunity gaps, they are also motivated capable learners with broad curiosities. It is also of relevance to maintain an awareness that the existing motivation is directly linked to student choice, and implications from my research would suggest a policy change that caters to student choice.

Implications for Practice & Future Research

The findings of this study are extremely important as it relates to the current scheduling policy that is in place. Each person that participated in this study via interview or focus group felt as if student choice was a better option than being randomly placed in elective classes. The findings from the implementation of my action plan are also demonstrating the importance of student choice. From the short time that my after-school program has been in place, I have already seen a full group of students with a much higher level of engagement than the group of students who were placed in my academic
courses with no input. Students are exceeding my initial expectations, and multiple students have already been offered college and university scholarships.

With the success of my band program, I am confident that it will encourage a policy change in which band students will be able to choose to remain in band class together during the course of an academic school day. With that being stated, the ultimate goal is to allow student choice as it pertains to selecting all elective courses. Pertaining to future research, I believe that elective teachers who teach other fine and performing art programs that are offered as elective courses should research and explore the opportunities that their respective crafts can present for students. They could create a similar action plan and after-school program as I presented. If our policymakers are able to see our students excelling in these programs due to student choice, then I believe that it is highly likely that this will instill a policy change in which student choice is implemented in scheduling all elective courses.

For example, a new policy can be enforced by deeming the first week of May of the current academic school “elective week.” During elective week, each student gets the opportunity to visit the classrooms of all elective course offerings within the school. A schedule will be created during this week in May in which students will attend a different elective course than their normally scheduled elective course. Students will spend the class period in the new course, gain insight pertaining to that course, and be able to choose the elective courses best coincides with their interests.

(See Figure 3)
**Figure 3**

**Policy Plan for Scheduling Students in Elective Courses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Tasks (How)</th>
<th>Person (Who)</th>
<th>Time (When)</th>
<th>Location (Where)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To promote the benefits, purposes and effectiveness of empowering students to choose their elective courses.</td>
<td>Implement a policy in which students are explained the benefits of each possible elective choice and allow students to choose the best option for themselves.</td>
<td>The students, the elective course teachers, and the overall school climate will benefit from this policy change.</td>
<td>The first week of May of the current academic school year.</td>
<td>Students should make these decisions at the school’s facilities.</td>
<td>Each student is provided with a form to fill out to indicate which classes best coincide with their interests.</td>
<td>Everything that each student needs to be a part of their desired elective courses is provided at no cost to the student.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the benefit, purpose, and effectiveness of empowering students to choose their elective courses in comparison to having electives chosen for them. The findings show that the benefit, purpose, and effectiveness is vast. Although this study is geared towards a single school within a single school district, I believe that this study can have a major impact for several schools and school districts that have low demographics. The Columbus City school district strongly emphasizes that our students gain knowledge that enables them to display positive results on academic and standardized assessments. There is a strong correlation between students who are engaged in instrumental music and success in academic and standardized assessments.

My action plan consists of upholding these goals of my school district by engaging more students in instrumental music. Along with creating an instrumental music program in order to encourage success for students who participate, this action plan also involves creating additional assessment opportunities that can enhance student success during academic and standardized testing. My action plan consists of the implementation of a band program in which students are thoroughly engaged. It will encourage a revised scheduling process in which students are able to continue their engagement as they will be allowed to choose to remain in instrumental music class during the course of the academic school year. This revised scheduling process should be applicable for all elective course offerings within our school as student engagement in elective courses goes hand in hand with student success.
References

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https://doi.org/10.32473/edis-hr020-2002


