

From struggle to strategy: emotional engagement and an emergent coping theory among Title I
instrumental music educators

by

Heather Nichole Baker

B.G.S., Ball State University, 2010
MM.Ed., VanderCook College of Music, 2012

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2026

Abstract

Using funding navigation as a lens, this dissertation investigates how instrumental music educators in Title I schools balance resourcefulness, resilience, and coping strategies. Title I schools, which serve high-need communities, often face chronic underfunding. This places substantial demands and emotional burdens on music educators striving to sustain high-quality programs with limited resources. Understanding how these educators navigate funding challenges and manage their emotional environment offers important insights for supporting teacher well-being, program sustainability, and equitable student access to music education.

Through qualitative narrative inquiry, eight instrumental music educators from diverse Title I schools participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed in two coding cycles, first identifying emotional associations and then broader themes related to funding and coping. Findings reveal that educators often make substantial personal, financial, and emotional investments, and experience a wide range of emotions—pride, hope, frustration, stress, and isolation—directly tied to funding demands. Coping strategies included seeking external funding, strategic planning, support networks, professional development, boundary-setting, and, at times, maladaptive habits such as overwork.

These findings highlight the hidden emotional and practical labor required to sustain music education in under-resourced settings. The study underscores the need for targeted professional development, increased funding transparency, and organizational support to promote educator well-being and program stability. By focusing on the experiences of Title I instrumental music educators, this research provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, administrators, and advocacy groups seeking to improve equity and support in music education.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Frederick Burrack

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Dedication

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** For all that endures, for all the journeys—through thick and thin. **

Preface: A Glimpse into the Perspectives

Traditional academic writing can struggle to capture the nuance, emotion, and weight of perspectives and experiences (Gilmore et al., 2019). To open this dissertation, you are invited into a different space: a stage, where the voices of educators—myself included—are brought to life. The empty stage, the scattered papers, and the interplay between the INTERVIEWER and MUSIC EDUCATOR are all drawn from authentic moments and voices encountered throughout this study. This approach offers a glimpse into participants' perspectives and introduces the themes of resourcefulness, community partnership, and emotional engagement that will be explored in depth in the following chapters. As you read and envision the scene, consider how these lived experiences set the stage for further inquiry into the perspectives of music educators in Title I schools (Batty, 2025). For the stage play, all statements are derived from participant responses but have been abridged, summarized, and aggregated rather than presented as direct quotations, for enhanced clarity and flow.

Characters:

The INTERVIEWER: The researcher (Me), who is also an educator. Present on stage the entire time.

The MUSIC EDUCATORS (A, B, & C): Brief appearances under a spotlight on stage right and left for quoted lines from participants.

Setting:

The stage is empty, except for an office desk and chair on stage left and a single chair on stage right. The desk has a lamp, a pen, loose stacks of papers, a trumpet lying discarded on top of a paper stack, a coffee mug, and a pile of notes. Warm, intimate light is used for the desk, and a spotlight will come on a single chair on stage right when different MUSIC EDUCATORS speak from it in an alternating succession.

- - - (*begin stage play*)- - -

[Lights come up on the INTERVIEWER, seated at a desk under warm lighting. The silence is calm and comfortable, and the desk light is on. THE INTERVIEWER picks up a pencil, hesitates, and then speaks.]

INTERVIEWER

[to the center of the audience]

If I could tell you one thing about teaching music in a Title I school, it's this: the job description neglects to reflect some of the most important responsibilities. The funding process is vital to operation, but there is little to no training offered to teachers for navigation.

[Pause. The INTERVIEWER flips through a stack of notes, finds a specific page, and smiles subtly.]

One of the educators explains their funding process experience...

[Spotlight UP on MUSIC EDUCATOR A, stage right, who delivers each of their lines directly as they would have come about in natural conversation. Animatedly with hand gestures; filled with a mix of concern and frustration.]

MUSIC EDUCATOR A

I feel frustration. Yeah. Frustration. I feel sad. I feel really scared. I feel abandoned. I feel lost. And larger than this, I feel stress.

[Spotlight fades from MUSIC EDUCATOR A. INTERVIEWER continues.]

INTERVIEWER

Our instrumental music teachers in Title I schools are experiencing exhaustion, stress, isolation, frustration, and vulnerability. They are being forced to choose between spending their own money on reeds, instruments, and necessities, or not being able to do their job.

[Pause; reflecting. Picks up a paper off the desk and reads this quote.]

I have been known to go on Facebook marketplace and find used instruments; clean them out and bring them to school.

[Spotlight UP on a MUSIC EDUCATOR B]

MUSIC EDUCATOR B

[using hand gestures and expressing frustration and pride]

I have probably given three to four trumpets to the school over the years. I've given three clarinets to the school. I make sure they're good to use, that they're safe to use. I clean them out. I fix them a little bit. I bought two snare drums. If I get to the last seven students and I don't have more wind instruments, I might say, "do you want to try percussion?" The number of percussionists might be greater than what I would like to have, but I have donated about ten instruments, usually between \$100-200 each, so somewhere between \$1,500 and \$2,000. The first year I taught, I paid for \$1,700 in reeds, just to be able to teach and do the gig.

[Spotlight fades from MUSIC EDUCATOR B. INTERVIEWER continues.]

INTERVIEWER

They learn quickly... if they want something for their students or need something for their class, they have to find a way. For some, if the job seems difficult, the assumption is that working harder will make it easier. The stress can add up quickly.

[The INTERVIEWER looks to stage right to cue the educator's quote. MUSIC EDUCATOR C is frozen mid movement as the spotlight comes UP on them and they deliver their lines with pride and excitement at their ability to be resourceful.]

MUSIC EDUCATOR C

The stress has drastically impacted my mental health. It has added new negative mental health diagnoses that have come directly from the funding process and have added medication into my life.

It has impacted relationships. It has impacted my ability to eat and take care of myself.

[Spotlight fades from MUSIC EDUCATOR C. INTERVIEWER lets out a quiet sigh in shared frustration. Picks up the stack of papers and straightens them.]

INTERVIEWER

The constant pressure to do more with less can take a real toll... especially without coping mechanisms or support.

[Spotlight fades from MUSIC EDUCATOR C. INTERVIEWER lets out a quiet sigh in shared frustration. Picks up the stack of papers and straightens them and the stage lights dim to darkness.]

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The prologue vignette is a reality for instrumental music educators in Title I schools, as schools continue to face underfunding challenges (Leachman, 2015). The funding challenges not only impact the music programs within the school (Hobby, 2004) but also the educators who run them (McDowell-Bush, 2024). The pressure to secure funding through fundraising and external resources creates undue stress and an emotional burden, affecting teacher performance and morale (Herman et al., 2018). This study sought to address a gap in the literature regarding the lived experience of the funding process and the emotional associations and coping strategies associated with those experiences. For external funding sources, there are many options available with a simple Google search: grants, foundations, strategic funding resources, and local community funding councils, programs, and associations. Fewer sources exist for discussing the toll of stress on music teachers' mental health (Randall, 2019; Payne et al., 2020), but no source exists to discuss navigating program funding, the emotional associations observed, and the strategies educators use to cope with the funding process.

Problem

The need for this study is reinforced by the absence of literature on emotional association and coping strategies for instrumental music educators as they deal with the invisible labor of funding their programs. No source discusses the emotional associations and connections to the navigation of the funding process. Existing research addresses resource attainment (Hobby, 2004), the effects of stress on the educator (Herman et al., 2018), and strategies for program development (Wong, 2009). Educators dealing with advocacy, funding strategies, and resource searches often experience frustration due to a lack of knowledge or training (Tiiley, 2024). Many recent resources exist on Title I funding: its ability to address fundamentals with equity (Hudge,

2025), the insufficiency of Title I resources (Walsh, 2025), and suggestions for innovative options for Title I funding (De La Cruz et al., 2025).

Randall (2019) discusses the dangers of stressors and their effects on educators, but there is no focus on instrumental music educators, especially in relation to their efforts to fund their programs. No attention has been given to coping strategies for teachers dealing with the funding process. A search for current research returns zero results using the keywords “funding process,” “music education,” and “coping strategies” or “emotional connections.” With the evidence of stress on educators (Herman et al., 2018) and the existence of research surrounding Title I schools’ funding inequalities (Hobby, 2004), there is a need to understand how instrumental music educators experience the funding process, the emotional associations perceived, and the strategies educators are using to cope with and manage those emotions.

Purpose

The focus of this narrative inquiry is an exploration of the perceptions and experiences of instrumental music educators in schools with a Title I designation as they recall their experiences with their school funding process. Title I schools are public schools that receive federal funding to support and supplement finances with the goal of helping children in low-income communities meet academic standards. This study’s approach uses eight semi-structured interview transcripts that were inductively coded. An initial coding round identified emotional associations based on observation and the conversational context during the interview. The second round of coding yielded a thematic analysis of the funding process. Participants ranged in age, experience level, geographic location, and school demographics. This study illuminates funding mechanisms and the emotions involved in navigating resources, and spotlights the coping strategies used by each participant.

Relevance and Impact

The relevance of this study lies in its identification of a literature gap and an overlooked area of focus for instrumental music educators in Title I schools. Focusing on the emotional associations in the funding process allows the study of diverse responses, job readiness training, and highlights pathways for coping and regulation. The findings of this study aim to inform future professional development offerings, policy regulation, and training for educator coping mechanisms. An awareness of the perceptions and emotional associations within the funding process allows administrators, collegiate music education programs, and policy leaders to reflect on implications for broader issues of teacher satisfaction, burnout, emotional regulation, and professional development.

Research Questions

1. How do instrumental music educators at Title I schools describe their experiences with the funding process?
2. What emotional connections are observed while recalling elements of the funding process with instrumental music educators in Title I schools?
3. What strategies are being employed by instrumental music educators in Title I schools to navigate the funding process?

Definitions of Terms

Boundary or Balance Strategy. Intentional actions or approaches used to manage stress to maintain a healthy environment for oneself.

Community Partnerships – a collaborative relationship between an organization or business.

Demographics. Characteristics used to identify or describe a school or instrumental program based on geographic location, student population, and school type (such as urban, rural, suburban).

District Funding Piece. A specific component or detail within the overall funding process used by a school district to distribute or allocate financial resources.

Financial Accounts. The various funding accounts or budget categories that are accessed or managed for specific expenses (booster accounts, instructional materials, equipment maintenance, travel, etc.).

Funding Process – The series of procedures, policies, communications, and actions associated with each instrumental music educator’s efforts to manage financial resources for their program.

Funding Strategies – various methods or approaches used by instrumental music educators to secure resources such as grants, fundraising, partnerships, and advocacy.

Professional Development (PD) Item. Ongoing training, education, or learning opportunities that support educators as they improve their skills, knowledge, or effectiveness.

Personal Contribution of Finances or Time. Finances or time that an educator provided or donated from their own resources. Supporting their students or program beyond their required duties.

Title I Program. A federally funded initiative under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that provides financial assistance to schools with high percentages of students from lower-income families. The goal of this legislation is to ensure that all students have access to educational opportunities and proficiency, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Transparency. Refers to the accessibility and ease of access to information regarding financial resources and their allocation, management, and spending details within a school district.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions. Assumptions play a key role in research. Assumptions are held as beliefs but cannot be validated or proven (Simon & Goes, 2012). The assumptions of this research include the following:

- (1) The funding process for instrumental music educators in Title I schools creates an array of emotional responses.
- (2) Teachers in Title I schools face specific challenges due to lower socio-economic community factors and Title I status, which are less prevalent in schools without Title I designations.
- (3) Participants will have honest and open responses to the questions being discussed.
- (4) Participants will have diverse methods of coping with the funding process and will utilize different strategies.

Limitations. Limitations refer to aspects of the study that are outside the researcher's control but can still influence the results due to the nature of the chosen design. Noting these constraints provides context for developing interpretations of the findings and highlighting potential directions for future investigation (Simon & Goes, 2012). The limitations of this research include:

- (1) This study contains a very specific sample of educators and cannot represent a generalizable outcome. Each school situation has an entirely different funding process, with diverse policies between districts and between states.

- (2) My teaching experience from three school systems that held Title I designations, presented the possibility of confirmatory bias when striving for objectivity, during the coding and analysis processes.
- (3) The diversity between years of teaching, demographic data of the school, funding process steps, state policy regarding Title I and similar legislation, and the severity of Title I status create variables that impact each situation differently.

Delimitations. Delimitations are defined by the boundaries of the study (Simon & Goes, 2012). This study focuses entirely on instrumental music educators in Title I schools with diverse demographics and locations. Generalizability is limited as each situation and school district is unique and diverse.

Study participants were purposively selected from area music education professionals, including district music supervisors, college music education professors, and area music education consultants, who reached out to their local communities to distribute the study information and recruit volunteers. This approach was designed to promote diversity of geographic location and school context.

Participation was ultimately based on self-selected volunteers rather than random selection.

Chapter 2 - Framework & Related Research

Conceptual Framework

I designed this study using a phenomenological approach to understand the human experience of navigating the funding process through the perspectives of instrumental music educators in Title I schools (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). I grounded my work in interpretivism and intentionally set aside pre-existing assumptions to examine each participant's perspective within their own reality (Crotty, 1998). This approach required me to embrace subjectivity and interpretation, considering multiple perspectives and ways of understanding, since reality is constructed through individual experience (Kim, 2016). Throughout the research process, I utilized reflective practices to remain aware of potential biases, as meaning was derived directly from the data and the educators' experiential contexts (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). I used inductive coding to remain authentic to the perspectives and analyzed the data as a whole to develop codes and categories for emotional association and primary themes for contextual content (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Review of Related Research

The Struggle for Resources. Funding serves as a vital asset for many educators as they struggle to find resources (Vargas, 2017). The budgetary climate of the last several decades has heavily impacted school districts and their funding decisions (Leachman, 2015; Burrack et al., 2014). Leachman discusses the decrease in state educational budgets and notes that most states are providing lower levels of financial support to districts than they did before the Great Recession (2015). As funding streams decline, instrumental music programs continue to receive fewer financial resources from their districts (Dev, 2010).

The national Title I program is a categorical program designed to meet the needs of low-income communities, with 40% or more of students receiving free or reduced lunch (USDOE, 2025; Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018). According to Ed Source (2010a), \$450 billion was spent on the national education budget in 2010. Of that amount, only 16% went to Title I schools. For the 2025 fiscal year, Title I schools received \$18.6 billion (USDOE, 2025). This amount is only about 2% of the total amount allocated for the annual K-12 educational budget (National, 2026). Title I schools received far fewer financial resources than their wealthier counterparts with strong tax-based income (Dev, 2010).

Title I schools play a key role in providing educational opportunities to underserved populations, yet they often encounter unique challenges that affect their resources and programs (Wells, 2009). Odden & Archibald (2013) found that resources have a substantial impact on student achievement, and Title I funds aim to close the achievement gap and minimize the impacts of poverty (Wells, 2009). According to Elpus (2019), while several teachers spoke of enriching their programs with supplemental funding, other programs struggled to offer basic music instruction. Instrumental music teachers in underfunded programs are expected to fundraise for needed classroom resources while negotiating the complexities of teaching in a Title I environment (Lien, 2012).

Stability and Effectiveness of Title I Funding. With the changing political climate of educational financial support, some argue about the sustainability of this funding source (Leachman, 2016). Debates exist over whether government funding can serve as a long-term option while the political landscape shifts for healthcare (Angelis et al., 2017) and education (Neher et al., 2017). Arguments exist over whether funds should be divided equally among schools with a Title I designation or fully allocated to the lowest socio-economic status areas

(Roza, 2005). Roza discusses equity questions about the program's effectiveness when resources are not funneled to the areas or schools most in need (2005).

The Unique Challenges in Title I Schools. The needs of Title I students, combined with the struggles of living in low-income communities, create unique challenges for the educators who teach there (Wells, 2009). Blodgett & Lanigan (2018) stated that students from Title I schools have backgrounds of adverse experiences that lead to behavioral issues and academic achievement barriers. Studies indicate that engagement in the arts positively affects student achievement, academic performance, and behavioral-social skill development. The National Endowment for the Arts (2012) published that focusing on expectations for high-achieving arts students is significantly more effective for academic and musical growth. At-risk students who participate in high-achieving programs have better access to educational opportunities for development than those who are unable to participate (Wells, 2009). A high-quality instrumental music education is key for fostering creativity, critical thinking, and social abilities among students, which contributes to their overall development and academic success (Hallam, 2010).

A proper budget is fundamental to providing a high-achieving arts program with strong educational outcomes (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Programs without adequate resources may not be able to utilize the same high-achieving standards, leaving them less effective in their outcomes (McGonigal, 2020). Funding and resources must be made available to realize the benefits of a comprehensive music education (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Alternative Funding Efforts. Outside-of-school funding efforts by booster groups and parent involvement have further widened the resource gap between programs, showing revenues that closely relate to and match their local household incomes (Elpus, 2019). Nelson (2013) states, “between 1995 and 2010, the number of school-supporting groups filing nonprofit tax

returns in the United States increased about 230%, from 3,475 to 11,453” (14). Elpus discusses the correlation between financial booster efforts in affluent areas and those of booster groups in lower-socioeconomic areas and stresses the staggering disparity in funding (2019).

Limited Access. Budgetary constraints in Title I schools limit access to instruments, materials, and enrichment activities, adversely affecting students' participation and educational results in music education (Hobby, 2004). Title I instrumental music programs frequently face significant funding shortages that hinder their ability to maintain high-quality instruction and secure the resources needed. As states slash funding while raising accountability (Leachman, 2015), resources are finite and are often funneled into testing and high-stakes impact areas (LOA, 2011).

The Toll On Music Educators. The emotional toll on music educators striving to secure funding for their programs is often compounded by the pressure to provide high-quality instruction amidst financial limitations (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). The overwhelming demands of obtaining funding go beyond teaching and create significant daily stress for educators (Thompson, 2017). Limited resources, lack of autonomy due to budget constraints, and stress contribute to high levels of “teacher turnover, absenteeism, mental and physical illness” (Greenberg et al., 2016). Teachers are leaving the field within the first five years of their career due to funding and support shortages, and personal burden (Ingersoll, 2002). Gallup (2013) reports that almost half of America’s teachers experience high levels of daily stress, which can affect mental health and teacher efficacy.

Emotional Connections. Randall (2019) discussed the emotional stressors of working in rural schools. He emphasizes that teacher satisfaction and burnout are directly related to the emotional aspects of the roles they hold and often lead to detachment and depression. These

emotional ranges stemming from job pressures make it difficult for teachers to deliver instruction, complete necessary tasks, set schedules, complete assessments, and set curriculum (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Randall, 2019). Stress and anxiety are highlighted throughout several studies as being detrimental to educators' well-being (Turner & Garvis, 2023; Steyn & Kamper, 2006).

Coping strategies for educators. Existing research on educator coping strategies includes an early study focusing on stress identification and its impact on teacher retention (Brown & Uehara, 1999). Cancio et al. (2018) conducted a study examining how special education educators manage stress in their workload. This study found that the stress levels of special education teachers affect the quality of their work.

Savage & Woloshyn (2022) discussed the use of coping strategies in their study, which found low scores in educator well-being, contrasted with high levels of perceived stress. This study found that females had higher levels of reported stress than their male counterparts, while also noting that participants were coping by using maladaptive strategies. Counterproductive coping strategies have also been associated with learning activities, as noted by Hastings & Brown in their study of educator burnout (2002).

Use of Screenwriting in Qualitative Research. The use of screenplay as a method for presenting qualitative research findings is increasingly recognized in academic literature as a legitimate and creative form of knowledge or understanding (Bourgeois-Bougrine et al., 2014). Screenwriting emphasizes the complexity and iterative nature of the writing process, guiding readers through a journey that is shaped by emotional factors to deepen the reader's perspective (Batty, 2025). Researchers synthesize multiple perspectives and move between emerging insights before arriving at a clear and concise narrative (Bourgeois-Bougrine et al., 2014). Batty

and Baker (2017) further position screenwriting as a mode of academic inquiry and argue that developing a screenplay within research contexts not only generates new understanding but also produces a valuable, non-traditional research artifact.

Screenplay combines creative writing and screen production, providing a unique and engaging way to present research findings that may be diminished by conventional reporting and impersonal writing styles (Batty et al., 2016). Lee et al. (2016) examine the challenges and opportunities associated with framing screenwriting as a research artifact and find that the screenplay allows for a deeper understanding of human experience. They state that while screenwriting may fall outside of traditional academic practices, its use in research can create rich discussion and new ways of representing narrative.

These perspectives support the use of screenplay as both a methodological tool and a research product in qualitative inquiry. This is especially true when the goal is to authentically represent participants' realities and invite a deeper and immersive engagement. This research employs screenwriting as a way of presenting rich perspectives through aggregated and clear experiences directly derived from participant responses (Berbary, 2011).

Phenomenology. Phenomenology is the study of the structural features of the human experience and is used to determine meaning and understanding (van Manen, 2017). Van Manen (2017) states that a phenomenological perspective focuses on meaning and understanding by exploring the occurrence and how such structure shapes a participant's view of the world around them. Understanding is derived directly from experiential context, suspending reflective assumptions, and permitting diverse versions of truth to be possible (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

Phenomenology stems from the early 20th-century works of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who used interview narratives to observe patterns based on the

circumstances of a particular phenomenon (Bailey & Moran, 2014). Husserl (2014) states that experiences must be captured in their primordial origin, without the participant interpreting their own feelings or theorizing their actions. Emphasis is not placed on introspective inquiry into responses, as phenomenology does not involve cognitive or affective reactions to what is being experienced (Smith, 2011). Focus is placed on the observation of how the themes are presented, how they reveal themselves, and how they appear within the consciousness of the responses (Marion, 2002).

Interpretivism. Interpretivism focuses on understanding a situation through a participant's beliefs, social contexts, and interpretations of their human behavior (Kim, 2016). Crotty (1998) emphasizes that perceived knowledge exists within lived experience. The focus is on the narrative's authenticity and the interpretation of participants' perspectives rather than on making justifications and rationalizations as a researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is important to recognize that interpreting phenomena is inherently subjective, shaped by the researcher's background, experience, biases, and perspective (Kim, 2016). The systematic approach of interpretivism delivers a deeper understanding of experience and emotion by objectively investigating them (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

The conceptual framework and reviewed literature directly informed the design and focus of this study by demonstrating the need to understand the emotional associations and coping strategies used by instrumental music educators throughout the funding process. The interpretivist and phenomenological approaches stressed the value of each participant's particular perspectives and individual realities to address the gap in the literature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This framework directly impacted the development of the research questions, the

interview questions, the interview observation procedure, and the reflexivity of the coding process (Kim, 2016).

The identified gaps in the prior literature shaped the formation of this study's research questions. The lack of information about the lived experience of the funding process among instrumental music educators in Title I schools required a focus on their experiences and emotional associations, which led to the development of research questions one and two. The areas of educator stress and funding challenges identified in the review of literature were foundational to the development of research questions two and three. After surveying the related literature, it was apparent that the focus of this study should address (1) the lived experience of the process, (2) the emotional associations observed, and (3) the coping strategies being employed.

Phenomenology and interpretivism were especially relevant to this study, as they intersect to allow each educator to hold their own perspectives on the funding process (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). These principles allow each educator to have a different emotional association or reaction to the questions and experiences (Crotty, 1998). This framework calls for the researcher to develop a sense of who the educator is as a teacher, a peer, and a human, in order to fully comprehend the perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; van Manen, 2017).

The concepts of emotional impact and educator stress were central to the development of the interview questions. Questions were centered on the exploration of participants' feelings, emotional responses, and sources of stress from within the funding process. Sections of the existing literature focused on the existence of coping strategies used to address the stresses of working as a Title I educator (Turner & Garvis, 2023; Steyn & Kamper, 2006). This prompted

the need to ask the participants about their support systems and strategies they found effective.

Questions also focused on how the music educators manage challenges from the funding process.

During the coding process, efforts were made to categorize associated emotions based on their alignment to positive or negative achievement, relationships, and health impacts. The categories of positive achievements and positive relationships were contrasted with their counterparts, negative achievements and negative relationships. The coding process was developed to capture the explicit mentioning of stress, along with the subtle observation of emotional associations. Several codes, such as *eustress*, *distress*, *engagement*, and *disengagement*, could be traced directly back to the literature.

Chapter 3 - Methodology & Design

Introduction

This study addressed a literature gap regarding the lived experience of the funding process, the emotional associations, and the coping strategies that pertain to those experiences. There are numerous resources for securing external funding (Hobby, 2004). However, no sources discuss navigating program funding for instrumental music educators in Title I schools, the emotional associations observed, or the strategies used to cope with the process. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to discover the emotional associations within the funding process and the coping strategies used by instrumental music educators in Title I schools as they manage it. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using the online program Zoom. The research questions were: (1) to understand how instrumental music educators from Title I schools describe their experience with the funding process, (2) to observe emotional connections associated with their recollections of the funding process, and (3) to understand the strategies being employed to navigate the funding process. These items allow for planning and targeted efforts for future professional development offerings. This chapter provides an overview of the study's design and methodology, identifying the procedures, population, sample size, and data collection.

Design and Method

This study implemented a qualitative research methodology to understand the lived experiences of instrumental music educators from Title I schools as they recollect and describe their experiences with the funding process. This study used narrative inquiry to directly deal with the complexity of participants' perspectives and beliefs, and to explore their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The thematic analysis process offered richness and depth, allowing

the development of an understanding of the support needed for music educators in the field (Braun & Clark, 2006). To examine available research, a keyword search was conducted that returned zero results for the terms *funding process*, *music education*, *coping strategies*, and *emotional connections*. According to Groskopf (2021), without coping strategies, teachers struggle with their role as educators and have no way to manage the stress associated with emotional connections. Studying the experiences, emotional associations, and coping methods used by instrumental music educators during their funding process directly aligns this study with the problem, the purpose, and the three research questions, while additionally addressing important questions arising from gaps in the literature. The research questions focus on (1) the lived experience of the educators as they discuss their understanding of the funding process, (2) the emotional associations connected to the process, and (3) what strategies are being employed to navigate the funding process.

The analysis process was designed around a phenomenological approach to understand the human experience as well as the educators' perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The lens of interpretivism was used to understand each participant's viewpoint from within their reality and understanding (Crotty, 1998). The subjectivity and interpretation of this approach permitted the consideration of the participants' attitudes and understanding to frame the context and guide understanding (Kim, 2016). The inference of emotional impact was derived directly from their experiential context, which made it possible for each participant to express their own version of truth and understanding (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Data were analyzed to produce primary and secondary codes for emotional association, and the primary themes were then developed through thematic coding of contextual content (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Ethical Considerations. Participants provided informed consent (see Appendix B) and received details about the study's purpose (Byrne, 2001). They had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time for data integrity or participant concerns (Gordon, 2006). They also maintained their anonymity through the use of pseudonyms, with all identifiable information removed from transcripts, preserving confidentiality (Gray, 2020).

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval. The IRB submission and training (see Appendix K) were completed for this research proposal, ensuring ethical practices and conduct. All materials were included and approved for distribution. The focus was on protecting participants' rights and general well-being. Anonymous interviews safeguarded participants' identities, and all remaining identifying factors were removed during transcription. This study used anonymous narratives, and all ethical protocols were followed during the process of conducting this research.

Anonymity and Security. A numerical pseudonym was assigned to each participant, enabling them to speak freely about sensitive topics (Mathers et al., 2000). During transcription, the videos were stored on a secure, password-protected device. After the transcriptions were completed, the Zoom videos were destroyed to protect participants' identities (Gray, 2020).

Data Analysis Protocol. To protect the integrity of this study and to produce reliable and reproducible results, a data analysis protocol was developed that emphasized consistency and transparency (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The protocol was designed to ensure that the analysis process was systematic and methodologically sound. The process consisted of a cycle of constant reflection and continual refinement (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) of themes to develop two separate codebooks (Roberts et al, 2019). Each codebook was created to capture specific dimensions of the educators' experiences and to ensure the complexity of their story was

honored. The coding approach included inductive coding to keep the outcomes as closely related to the narratives as possible (Braun & Clark, 2006). The inductive coding process involved open coding, creating initial categories based on the data. Refinement of the categories led to thematic development (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2023). Zoom recordings of the interviews were transcribed. They were then reviewed for emotional associations and observed emotional tones. These observations were coded into categories and given the following names: (1) positive achievement, (2) positive relational, (3) eustress, (4) engaged, (5) negative achievement, (6) negative relational, (7) distress, and (8) disengaged (Creswell & Cresswell, 2023). (see Appendix F for the emotional observation codebook) After the emotional coding was completed, primary themes were developed to indicate items of interest within each educator's funding process experience. Primary themes included (1) mission & impact, (2) roles, relationships, & support, (3) navigating systems & strategies, (4) professional growth & development, and (5) boundaries & balance. (see Appendix H for the primary theme codebook).

Role of the Researcher and Positionality. As the researcher, I played a key role in interpreting data throughout this study. As an educator in Title I schools for 11 years, it was vital to remove elements of bias and maintain objectivity throughout the study (Bourke, 2014). My experience working in a Title I school heightened my awareness of issues related to equity and access. I observed disparities in resources, staffing, funding, and support between my school and others in the district without the Title I designation. It became evident to me that funding levels were directly linked to students' opportunities and academic results. I found that providing my students with experiences comparable to those in better-resourced schools required additional resourcefulness and creativity.

Handling these challenges illustrated the importance of advocacy, effective communication, and empathy. I developed a deeper understanding of students' needs, not only in terms of musical instruction, but also for emotional support and encouragement to help them overcome challenges and barriers. For years, I purchased large boxes of Poptarts for students who came to school without breakfast. This experience led me to reflect on the broader efforts of instrumental music educators in Title I schools and how they go above and beyond for their students. These experiences ultimately motivated me to address gaps in the literature and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the circumstances faced by educators in under-resourced environments.

In this study, I did not focus on introspective insights from my own background, but rather on the observation of how descriptions and information presented themselves and appeared from the viewpoints of the educators I interviewed (Marion, 2002). I engaged in continuous self-reflection regarding my beliefs and potential biases throughout the research process to authentically examine and understand (Creswell & Cresswell, 2023). Elements of self-reflection are integrated throughout Chapters 3 and 4, specifically in the *role of the researcher and positionality* section of Chapter 3. I discuss my background as an educator, acknowledge potential bias, and outline the steps I took to ensure reflexivity throughout the study. In Chapter 4, I address the *reliability, validity, and triangulation* using a reflexive journal. I used the reflexive journal to examine how my positionality and potential biases influenced the outcomes and analysis. The limitations and discussion section of Chapter 5 addresses transparency in the research process. Appendix L shows a combination of process-based and in-the-moment reflections that presented themselves during the data collection and analysis phases.

Setting, Sample, and Participants

Setting. The setting for this qualitative phenomenological study was a diverse group of school districts, all with Title I designations, but across multiple demographic regions. The selected sampling areas were chosen to gather perspectives from educators throughout various states, yielding varied backgrounds and situations. Based on music educators' feedback and descriptions, the districts were classified as urban, suburban, or rural. The chosen states were selected based on the following criteria:

- (1) California, for its extra policy and legislation for Title I funding.
- (2) Texas, for the state's highly developed music education structure.
- (3) North Dakota, for the community support within extremely rural areas.
- (4) Illinois, for the rural/urban diversity and its strong, state-mandated funding practice
- (5) Alabama, for access and funding inequalities in rural and under-resourced areas

Inclusion Criteria. To participate in this research, educators had to serve as instrumental music educators at a school with a current Title I designation. The severity of the Title I status was not considered relevant, as the goals of the study were to understand how instrumental music teachers in schools with a Title I designation describe their experiences with the funding process, the emotional associations they observe, and the coping strategies they use to navigate it.

This study used the following inclusion criteria for participants: (1) participants must have more than one year of teaching experience, (2) participants were required to submit the Informed Consent document (see Appendix B), (3) participants must be currently teaching music for a middle or high school instrumental music program at the time of the interview, and (4) must be currently working in a Title I designated school. Educators with 1 year of teaching experience

were excluded, as many variables and stressors are present in the first year of teaching (Fitchett et al., 2018).

Recruitment Process. An initial recruitment email (see Appendix A) was used for preliminary data collection. The email was sent out as an invitation to participate. It was promoted by regional music education professionals and forwarded to music educators in each region. The recruitment email introduced the study and invited interested individuals to volunteer. The email contained a hyperlink that led potential participants to the interest survey (see Appendix C) to collect data on eligibility and interest. The interest survey was created using Google Forms. All responses were stored within the document. Potential participants supplied contact information and school demographic data. Once educators indicated a willingness to participate, they received an email containing an invitation and the Informed Consent document (see Appendix B). Once signed, copies of the informed consent document were stored securely on a locked hard drive. A date and time were then set for a semi-structured Zoom interview.

Sample Size and Participants. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to meet the research goals and to yield deeper, more meaningful observations with fewer participants (Palinkas et al., 2015). Local music education professionals disseminated an initial recruitment email (see Appendix A), containing a link to an interest survey to local music teachers in their geographic areas. The informational email was sent to teachers from Title I schools in those specific regions. Interested instrumental music teachers in Title I schools could volunteer by completing the interest survey. Using instrumental music professionals from different areas and geographic regions offered validity and credibility for triangulation and enabled a more complete and accurate understanding (Carter et al., 2014).

Finding participants for this study proved difficult. The regional music education professionals who distributed the initial interest survey were enthusiastic; however, using email to circulate survey information and a hyperlink was problematic. It was difficult to make meaningful bonds with educators so they would find interest, see the study as meaningful, and choose to volunteer. When two additional participants were needed, one of the music education professionals provided some time for presenting and sharing this research information at an association meeting for the National Association for Small School Bands. The last two spots were quickly filled after describing the study and requesting volunteers.

Initially, the sample size was planned to utilize approximately six educators, depending on data saturation rates (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). In qualitative research, the data saturation point is reached when no new information or insight appears (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The perspectives were extremely similar throughout the first six interviews. Slight alterations and additions to codes occurred, but the codes remained the same for the majority of the data coding process for participants one to six. The redundancy created by the absence of new themes and perspectives signaled that the saturation point may have been met. One final interview was conducted to complete the data collection process (see Appendix D for the Interview Questions, which are included in the Interview Protocol). However, the codes shifted slightly in the seventh interview, indicating a need for an eighth interview. When the codes remained the same across the eighth interview, saturation was considered met, and no further participants were needed (Gibson & Brown, 2009).

Data Collection Instruments

As the researcher, I was the primary instrument for data collection within this qualitative research study on emotional association and the coping strategies of instrumental music

educators during the recollections of their funding process experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participant information was collected using an initial interest survey and an informed consent form. The initial interest survey requested school demographic data and participants' contact information. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool.

Informed Consent. Each participant in this study received an informed consent letter (see Appendix B) before becoming involved. The informed consent document clarified the research purpose, process, and confidentiality procedures (Byrne, 2001). If at any time participants decided to withdraw from the study, they could withdraw with no consequences (Gordon, 2006). Reassurances of anonymity and confidentiality were explained and offered (Gray, 2020). The informed consent documents were kept on file for the duration of the research study process.

Initial Interest Survey. The initial interest survey (see Appendix C) was distributed to provide information about the study and search for potential participants. The interest survey included the study title, my location as the researcher, the institution, contact information, and a summary of the study. The initial interest survey also allowed potential participants to input their preferred contact information if they were interested in participating. The interest survey requested the following as multiple choice questions: (1) Title I school status, (2) years of teaching experience, (3) program and school demographics, (4) primary teaching position information, (5) region/state of school location, and (6) a question asking for the volunteer's familiarity with their school's funding process.

Semi-Structured Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection for this qualitative study. Open-ended questions (see Appendix D for the Interview Questions, which are included in the Interview Protocol) gathered information on each

participant's views and experiences (Creswell & Cresswell, 2023). Clarification questions were asked throughout the interview to examine follow-up items as they naturally arose during the conversation (Creswell & Cresswell, 2023). The interviews were all conducted on Zoom and were recorded for transcription.

Interview Protocol Guide. The interview protocol guide (see Appendix D) provided a flexible, structured framework. The document served as a road map for the interview, allowing the trajectory to remain on task and keep the interviewer on track (Jamshed, 2014). A copy of the interview guide was printed out for each interview and served as a note-taking tool to allow me to track notes, ideas, and reflective thoughts during the conversation (Ortlipp, 2008).

Pilot Study. An initial field test was utilized to pilot the parameters and protocols of this study. For the pilot study, three educators were purposively selected based on the qualifying criteria, and their similarity to those educators in the main sample (Campbell et al., 2020). The initial questions were tested for bias, clarity, and feedback (Jamshed, 2014). Input from these participants helped clarify the interview length, the number of questions, potential leading words, and the clarity of meaning (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2023). After a review of the pilot study feedback, alterations were made to improve the validity of the interview protocol and interview questions.

Table 3.1 outlines specific sections and questions where feedback indicated (1) an assumed self-awareness from the participant, (2) some questions were too broad or unclear, (3) the layout of the questions did not have good flow for building rapport, (4) some questions were complex and combined multiple topics, (5) there was an assumption of success and coping, and (6) the wording was leading or presuming positive outcomes that would influence the participant. Table 3.1 shows feedback along with the corresponding changes, including revisions to the

initial questions which strengthened the study through enhanced focus and clarity. The revisions allowed participants to provide detailed, unbiased, and relevant responses (see Appendix D for the Interview Protocol, which contains the Interview Questions).

Table 3.1. Specific Feedback and Corresponding Changes

Original Item	Feedback/ Rationale	Revised Item
The layout of the sections: (1) Experience with funding (2) Perception of past experiences and navigating challenges (3) Interconnectedness of emotional well-being, instruction quality, and effectiveness	The initial layout inappropriately captured educators' perspectives on their purpose, goals, and interests, which are key to understanding their decisions and choices. Incorporating an introductory section provides context and insight into each educator's viewpoint. This also creates confidence and rapport between the researcher and the participant. This layout allowed for an introductory section where participants would share background and context on their perspective, followed by an intense section where complicated and sensitive information is shared, and then an encouraging closing section where participants are able to reflect, share what they have learned, and offer insight to others. This format provides closure and lessens the discomfort of challenging questions.	The revised layout used the following sections: (1) Introduction & rapport building (2) Funding process experience (3) Emotional & relational perspectives (4) Looking forward
Offering the questions ahead of time for participants to preview and contemplate.	Initially, it appeared to be a good idea to offer the questions ahead of time to the pilot study with the understanding that the answers would have more breadth with reflection time and preparation. Previewing the questions had several drawbacks. Rehearsed and carefully prepared answers lacked authenticity and the intensity of feeling that occur in real-time conversation. Responses lacked genuine perspective and associated insight of spontaneous reactions. Some participants prepared the questions, while others did not, which created comparability issues.	If participants inquired about the interview questions, they were informed that no preparation was necessary and that authentic, candid responses were encouraged. They were reassured that there would be no pressure to provide rehearsed answers and that there were no correct answers.
Questions: Can you describe the funding structure for your program? Can you describe your program's financial situation?	These questions were vague, complex, and filled with jargon. Participants found them tricky to answer or understand and asked to have the questions repeated. They did not provide the intended focused information. These questions were broken down into several questions that specifically addressed the participants' knowledge of allocation, funding sources, and their role within the process.	These questions were altered to become the following questions: (1) What is your understanding of how funding is determined for your program? (2) Can you describe how your program fits within the district allocation process? (3) Could you talk a little about your district's funding sources? (4) What role do you play in your program's funding process?

Question:
What emotions do you associate with the challenges you face regarding funding for your program?

This question implies the existence of difficulties and emotional awareness. It assumes the participants have already reflected on the emotions they associate to the funding process. The question is also leading. There was no context built up before allowing the participants to describe their reactions and feelings. It didn't offer prompts or grounding for the participants to expand on emotional associations. I decided to focus more on coping strategies and to allow clarifying questions to discuss emotional response.

The revised questions:
(1) Are there ways you manage the emotional aspects of working with funding processes?
(2) Can you share any experiences that highlight the connection between funding and your emotional response?
(3) Can you describe a challenging moment during the funding process? How did you cope with those emotions?
(4) Are there supports you wish were available?
(5) Can you talk about any support systems you have in place?
(6) Are there specific boundaries you have put in place that have provided relief or support?

Question:
In what ways do you think your network and/or community have played a role in helping you navigate funding challenges?

This question needed neutral language to avoid assumptions and leading. There is an assumption that a funding challenge already exists without earlier context. There was also no context for the network; it assumed a support network was in existence and that it was positive. By combining network and community, two separate variables were placed together. The revised questions would need to address both separately.

The revised questions:
(1) Can you talk about any support systems you have in place?
(2) How effective do you feel these strategies have been for managing your feelings?
(3) Have you explored professional development to help manage emotions or stress?

Question:
Can you share an experience when you felt that your emotional state influenced the quality of instruction?

Participants found it difficult to answer this question. There is an element of assumed influence, which didn't resonate with all participants. There was worry that there may be pressure to find an example, even if one didn't fit well. There was an effort to make this question more open-ended and remove assumptions.

The revised question:
In your experience, do you think your emotional state ever impacts your instruction? And if so, is there a time when this may have happened?

Question:
How do you maintain a sense of fulfillment and effectiveness as a music teacher, despite the pressures of funding and budget constraints?

This question was complex, assuming, and leading. Neutral language was sought that wouldn't exclude struggles or assume success or fulfillment. This question was shifted to focus entirely on coping strategies. Once it was broken up into the appropriate coping questions, the emotional coding would look for fulfillment areas.

The revised questions:
(1) How do you usually cope with work stress and emotion?
(2) How effective do you feel these strategies have been for managing your feelings?

Data Collection Process and Analysis

Data Collection. This research aimed to explore how instrumental music educators in Title I schools describe their lived experiences with the funding process. The data collection process involved semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2023). The steps for data collection are listed below:

- (1) An email was sent to music education professionals in the following states: Texas, California, Illinois, New York, Florida, and Indiana. Music education professionals who responded with a willingness to distribute the study information to local instrumental music educators in their regions were utilized as communication hubs for local teachers in their area who work in Title I schools.
- (2) A recruitment email (see Appendix A) was sent to the interested music education professionals that would inform teachers about the study and provide a hyperlink for the interest survey (see Appendix C) to collect the information of potential participants who volunteered to receive more information.
- (3) Participants who met the qualifying criteria were contacted and invited to participate in the study and were given the informed consent form (see Appendix B) to sign and return.
- (4) An interview date and time was set for the instrumental music educators from Title I schools who returned the informed consent form and volunteered to participate.
- (5) A reminder email was sent the morning of each interview to confirm the details and ensure participation.

Each semi-structured interview followed the interview guide (see Appendix D) and protocol, which was approved by the IRB.

- (1) All interviews were held over the Zoom platform, with recorded consent from each participant. The program recorded the interviews, including all visual cues and verbal responses (Bryman, 2012).
- (2) A hard copy of the interview guide was printed for each participant. During each interview, I made notes on the interview guide to reflect on my thoughts, ideas, and observations.

Zoom Platform. Data were collected using the technology program, Zoom Video Communications, Inc. (Zoom) platform. The easy-to-use interface allowed for broad access across vast geographic distances (de Villiers et al., 2021). Positive aspects of using the Zoom program included its simplicity of navigation and use, the privacy of a safe space for the participant, accessibility across a broad range of devices, and the elimination of travel costs for the researcher (Gray, 2020). Several drawbacks exist for virtual interviews (de Villiers et al., 2021). The drawbacks that were experienced during this study's virtual interviews included minor issues with infrequent lag, limited visuals beyond facial expressions, and occasional time-zone issues with logging into the meeting.

Tactiq. The transcription software utilized for this research was Tactiq. Tactiq generates concise summaries of Zoom conferences, stores them by date, and keeps all the details within the flow on the main screen (Tactiq, 2025). AI was utilized to generate a transcript for each interview video quickly. I confirmed the transcript against the video and verified the language and punctuation for accuracy with the participants through member checking.

Use of Research Questions as Guiding Framework. The following research questions were used to guide the direction of the coding process and primary theme development:

- (1) How do instrumental music educators in Title I schools describe their experiences with the funding process?
- (2) What emotional connections are observed while instrumental music educators in Title I schools recall elements of the funding process?
- (3) What strategies are being employed by instrumental music educators in Title I schools to navigate the funding process?

Data Analysis. Systematic techniques were used to prepare, organize, and examine the data based on the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Using Microsoft Word, the transcripts were cleaned and formatted with the same font, format, and layout (Thomas, 2006). The transcript format can be found in Table 3.2. The transcripts were saved using the interview number of each participant (for example: P1).

Table 3.2. Transcript Formatting for the Coding Process

Thematic Coding	Transcript Body	Emotional Coding
	P1:	

Familiarization. Continuously reading and familiarizing myself with the data was extremely important. Using the phenomenological and interpretivist frameworks, the interviews were reviewed and considered from the participant's perspective and point of view. The transcripts were read and reviewed several times to determine intent and understanding before the analysis process (Braun & Clark, 2006). Understanding the material from the perspective of the participant involved editing the transcript, completing initial readings, and engaging oneself in the participant's perspective. The transcripts were carefully edited to remove filler words and duplicated wording and then double-checked for accuracy against the video recordings (Braun & Clark, 2006).

First Coding Cycle: Emotional Coding for Codes and Categories. The coding process for open analysis began without predesigned codes. This choice was deliberate and ensured that the codes would be grounded in the actual data, rather than coming from a pre-existing framework (Thomas, 2006). After the initial readings were completed, several more readings were carried out to tag emotions appropriate to the observed context. Emotions were considered in a line-by-line process, using the observed emotion's name for identification of each thought expressed by the participant. After reading a passage, the observed emotions were coded and then notated in a large list.

Line-by-line open coding was performed on the transcripts (Thomas, 2006). Each chunk of text was labeled manually, according to the observed emotional tones and associations (Coates et al., 2021). Each identified emotion was assigned a descriptive label based on my observation and interpretation as the researcher. This process generated latent codes that captured deeper meaning and underlying expression (Vears, 2022).

Inductive coding techniques allowed for the codes and themes to build from the ground up, directly from the data (Vears, 2022). This prevented forced observations of pre-created codes, which could shift meaning and create authenticity issues (Thomas, 2006). Using the research questions as a guide, codes were developed by referencing both latent (underlying ideas) and manifest (literal meaning from the text) content (Vears, 2022). For example, if a participant mentioned fundraising, that chunk of text would be coded as “fundraising.”

During the coding process, the codes only shifted slightly. Emotions were easily identified using broad terms that did not morph. During refinement, it was determined that the following codes were extremely similar and were combined under the code *hopeful*: excited,

hopeful, enthusiastic for future, and eager. Deliberation over the data surrounding these codes determined that *hopeful* encompassed each instance.

Once the coding was completed, codes were analyzed and placed into larger categories within a codebook to show connections and patterns (Roberts et al., 2019) (see Appendices F and H for the codebooks). Using an iterative process, once three of the transcripts were initially coded, those codes were categorized into larger categories to form the following code categories: (1) Positive Achievement, (2) Positive Relational, (3) Eustress, (4) Engaged, (5) Negative Achievement, (6) Negative Relational, (7) Distress, and (8) Disengaged. Each category was assigned a numerical identifier, and the codes were placed beneath it and numbered within it. Colors were assigned to easily identify usage within the transcript.

The emotions matched to the *positive achievement* category were easily identified. Pride, satisfaction, joy, relief, and appreciation for the process all align with happiness in the educators' successes. Gratitude, admiration, trust, empathy, and contentment were placed together because of their alignment to positive connections and responses to others. The *eustress* category exists with only one code, hopefulness. This category is based on the feelings of positive stress for the future (Venkatesh & Ram, 2015). It encompasses feelings of excitement and optimism.

The engaged category is large. It is an intentional category created around the idea of engagement as a mode of coping, overcoming, and adapting to find success and emotionally regulate in the work environment (Chaudhary et al., 2013). These emotions, unlike the other categories, are driving forces behind rising to the challenge and deciding to fight in response to the mission and goal. When faced with program budget cuts, an educator can respond with disappointment and frustration (category 5) or with courage, persistence, and protectiveness (from the engaged category). These emotions are a conscious choice to go to bat for the mission.

In this work environment, instrumental music educators can choose varying options for emotionally engaging themselves, which impacts how they view their work (Kahn, 1990). Determination, persistence, resourcefulness, selflessness, openness, reflection, courage, protectiveness, sacrifice, and faith are all emotional tendencies related to seeing the problem and choosing not to be a passive recipient of the circumstances. These educators consistently adjusted to resist and rebuild, demonstrating that resilience and being engaged are not merely personal traits but a deliberate choice and practice.

Emotions that oppose *positive achievement*, such as frustration, disappointment, impatience, bitterness, irritation, and concern, were placed together. As stated, they oppose *positive achievement*, so the category was named *negative achievement*. Isolation, loneliness, abandonment, disillusionment, and vulnerability all deal with relationships, but in a way that suggests negative feelings toward others or oneself. The hurtful feelings of being alone and left out are contrasted with being happy alone, contentment, and happy with others, gratitude. Because of this contrary existence, this category was named *negative relational*.

At times the educators experienced work demands that exceeded their ability to cope. The aversive feelings of stress, feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, fatigued, and anxious are responses to negative stress (Venkatesh & Ram, 2015). These codes were categorized into a category named *distress*. While eustress motivates and energizes, distress causes discomfort and pain (Szabo, 2020). The final category was titled *disengaged*. The neutral code was used in areas where the participants seemed detached or offered only factual information, without emotion (Kahn, 1990; Chaudhary et al., 2013).

It was an intricate and organic process to name each category. Several shifts were considered, along with their emotional implications, including their opposites. The first category

was relatively straightforward. It encompasses *pride, satisfaction, joy, relief, and appreciation*. These emotions are all related to positive achievement. I named this category *positive achievement*, which, in turn, led to the creation of its opposite category, *negative achievement*, encompassing *frustration, disappointment, impatience, bitterness, irritation, and concern*. Category 5 included all areas where achievement was hindered. These two categories were the first to be established and set a foundation for the coding category structure.

The second category was also easy to identify. It centered on emotions related to other people and relationships, such as *gratitude, admiration, trust, empathy, and contentment*. The category became named *positive relational* for relationships to self and others, which set up category six to be named *negative relational* for relationships to self and others. Category six included the observed emotions of *loneliness, isolation, abandonment, disillusionment, and vulnerability*.

The third category presented more of a challenge. Initially, I labeled it *hopefulness*, as it contained only the hopefulness code. While developing contrasting categories for emotions such as *stress, overwhelm, fatigue, exhaustion, and anxiety*, I originally named the seventh category *stress* because the primary code was *stress*. After reflection and review of relevant literature, I recognized the distinction between positive and negative stress. Positive stress, or eustress, generates energy, excitement, and hopefulness, while negative stress, or distress, can adversely affect health and well-being (Venkatesh & Ram, 2015; Szabo, 2020). This led me to adopt *eustress* and *distress* as category names, which provided a more complete and reciprocal insight into these emotional experiences.

For the fourth category, I initially titled it as *adaptive* due to participants' eagerness to adapt in challenging situations. Their deliberate choice to persevere, rather than withdraw,

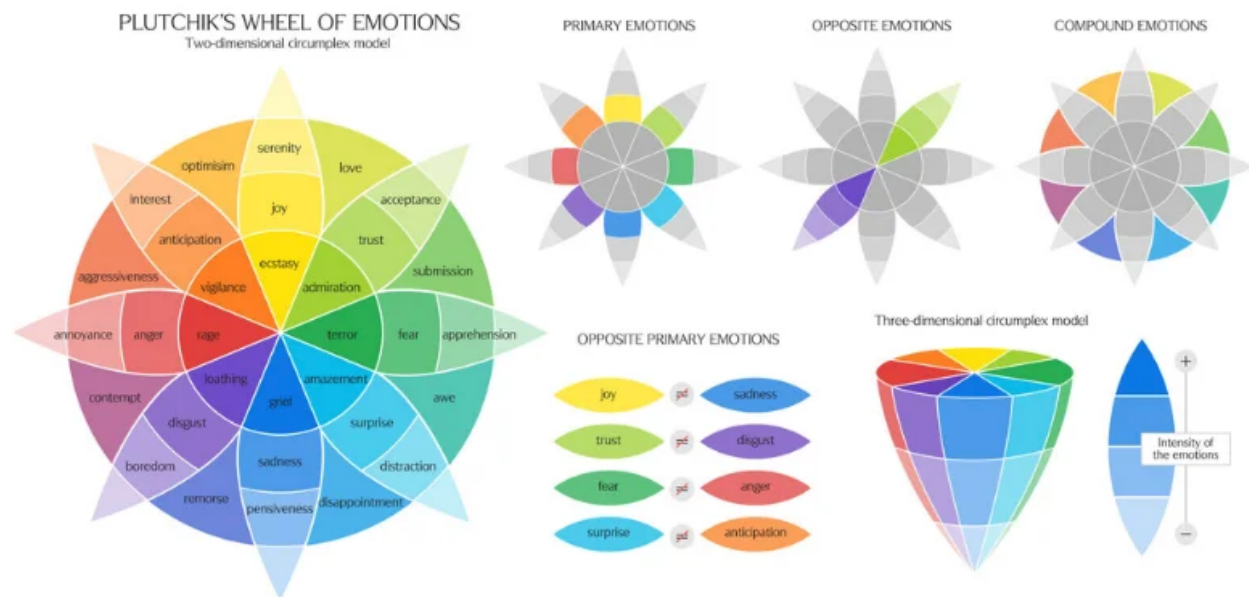
caused me to consider the opposite category as *neutral* or *uninvolved*. As I considered further and consulted relevant literature, the idea evolved into *engaged* versus *disengaged*, representing the contrast between active involvement and emotional detachment (Chaudhary et al., 2013). This process was iterative and ensured that each category name correctly portrayed the emotional environment described by participants while confirming each area with established concepts in the literature.

The Emotional Tone Codebook used 37 emotional codes across 8 categories (see Appendix F). For a complete list of emotional codes and their definitions, see Appendix G.

The existing literature referenced the frustrations of the work environment (Savage & Woloshyn, 2022; McDowell-Bush, 2024; Thompson, 2017; Greenberg et al., 2016; Turner & Garvis, 2023) but did not expand on related emotions or the wider spectrum of potentially positive emotional interactions of relationships and achievements.

Resources. Several resources were used to secure correct emotional interpretation, including synonym resources, emotional frequency visuals, and Plutchik's Emotional Wheel (Semeraro et al., 2021). (see Figure 3.1 for Plutchik's Emotional Wheel).

Figure 3.1. Plutchik’s Emotional Wheel (Six Seconds, 2025)



Plutchik’s model served as a visual reference during the interview and the familiarization phase (Six Seconds, 2025). This helped to specify emotional intensity and relationships. For example, the term *rage* may be classified as *anger* at a moderate intensity level, or *annoyance* at the lowest intensity, based on Plutchik’s framework. Terms identified in this process were used as the basis for open coding (Coates et al., 2021). Statements that lacked emotional expression were coded as ‘disengaged.’

Once the complete list of emotions was compiled, connections were mapped to group the emotions into categories. Plutchik’s visual model guided the structure of the codebook layout. Plutchik emphasized opposing emotions, without the existence of good or bad connotations, to show that each emotion is balanced by a corresponding counterpart (Plutchik, 1980). This idea was used to develop the categories and the structure of the codebook (see Appendix F for the emotional codebook). For example, the category *positive achievement*, is contrasted by *negative*

achievement; *positive relational* is opposed to *negative relational/isolation*; *eustress* is contrasted with *distress*; *engaged* is paired with *disengaged*. The pairing of *engaged* and *disengaged* exist as resiliency requires deep emotional engagement, while neutral is often emotionally disengaged. The emotional pairings are represented in Table 3.3. The full codebooks for both the emotional codes and the primary themes are available in Appendices F and H. The categories are provided with a definition of each and a descriptive quote example from the narratives in Table 3.4.

Table 3.3. Emotional Coding Categories and Opposing Categories

Category	Opposing Category
Positive Achievement: <i>Pride, Satisfaction, Joy, Relief, Appreciation</i>	Negative Achievement: <i>Frustration, Disappointment, Impatience, Bitterness/Irritation, Concern</i>
Positive Relational: <i>Gratitude, Admiration, Trust, Empathy, Contentment</i>	Negative Relational: <i>Loneliness, Isolation, Abandonment, Disillusionment, Vulnerability</i>
Eustress: <i>Hopefulness</i>	Distress: <i>Stress, Overwhelm, Exhaustion/Fatigue, Anxiety</i>
Engaged: <i>Determination, Persistence, Resourcefulness, Selflessness, Openness, Patience, Self-awareness, Courage, Protectiveness, Sacrifice, Faith-based</i>	Disengaged: <i>Neutrality</i>

Table 3.4. Emotional Tone Categories and Codes (Definitions and Descriptive Quotes)

Parent Code	Definition	Sample Quote from Narrative
1: Positive Achievement Pride, Satisfaction, Joy, Relief, Appreciation	Emotions arising from personal or group accomplishment.	“Getting that funding was a huge relief.” “I really appreciate the support from our boosters.”
2: Positive Relational Gratitude, Admiration, Trust, Empathy, Contentment	Emotions focused on connection, support, and positive regard for others.	“I trust my boosters to handle fundraising.” “I’m content with the way my team works together.”
3: Eustress Hopefulness	Emotions related to anticipation, optimism, and positive outlook for the future.	“I’m optimistic about next year’s budget.” “I’m hopeful our program will keep growing.”
4: Engaged Determination, Persistence, Resourcefulness, Selflessness, Openness, Patience, Self-awareness, Courage, Protectiveness, Sacrifice, Faith-based	Emotions and states reflecting action, adjustment, and constructive responses to challenges.	“I’m determined to get instruments for every student.” “We kept applying for grants until one came through.” “I spent my own money so no child would go without.”
5: Negative Achievement Frustration, Disappointment, Impatience, Bitterness/Irritation, Concern	Emotions related to setbacks, failures, or dissatisfaction with outcomes or progress.	“It was frustrating to fill out forms and never get a response.” “I’m impatient with all the red tape.” “I was disappointed when our grant was denied.”
6: Negative Relational Loneliness, Isolation, Abandonment, Disillusionment, Vulnerability	Emotions about lack of connection, support, or belonging; social pain or criticism.	“I’m the only music teacher in the district.” “I thought admin would help, but nothing changed.” “Talking about my burnout feels risky, but it is real.”
7: Distress Stress, Overwhelm, Exhaustion, Fatigue, Anxiety	Emotions tied to pressure, threat, or danger to self or program.	“I’m stressed about meeting everyone’s needs.” “There’s just too much on my plate.” “I’m exhausted from late nights and weekend events.”
8: Disengaged Neutrality	Absence of emotion or emotionally neutral statements, facts, or perspectives.	“Our district has 350 students in two buildings.” “I just do what needs to be done.” “The boosters handle all fundraising.”

Second Coding Cycle: Thematic Coding. The second round of coding focused on identifying topics related to the funding process. Inductive coding techniques allowed codes to emerge naturally from the data (Vears, 2022). This methodology helped eliminate the use of predetermined codes, which could potentially alter meaning and raise questions about authenticity (Thomas, 2006). Both latent (implied themes) and manifest coding (direct interpretations from the text) were used to name the codes (Vears, 2022). For example, if a participant spoke about a supportive relationship with their principal, that section might be coded ‘support.’ If the participant mentioned ‘fundraising,’ that specific portion of text would be coded as “fundraising” (Thomas, 2006). Alphabet letters were assigned to text chunks based on different parts of the funding process. Those codes were notated and categorized to show overarching themes based on patterns and connections (Braun & Clark, 2006). None of the thematic codes changed or altered during the process. The descriptive nature of the codes allowed for consistent categorization within the narratives. The alignment of themes to code categories and codes is shown in Table 3.5. For a complete list of thematic code definitions, see Appendix I.

Table 3.5. Primary Themes based on Code Relationship to the Funding Process

Primary Theme	Code Categories	Codes
Mission & Impact	Perception of impact on program and student learning. Mission oriented: “call to contribute.”	• Perception of impact on program and student learning. • Personal Contribution (Financial/Time)
Roles, Relationships, & Support	Impacts of others: relationships & connections. Perceptions of support: peer, administration, mentors, boosters, partnerships.	• Relationships & connections • Perception of support: peer, administration, mentors, boosters, partnerships • Demographics • Educator role
Navigating Systems & Strategies	Understanding of the funding process. Legal or policy regulation item. Perspectives on the importance of advocacy or visibility (community/school) Perspectives on of transparency Tactics in action: navigational approaches	• Understanding of the funding process • District funding item • Federal or policy item • Financial accounts • Fundraising strategy • Legal or policy regulation item • Funding process item • Grant strategy • Perspective on advocacy or visibility • Perspective on transparency • Vocalizing needs • Inventory: inadequate or broken materials/equipment • Repair service • Obstacles or repercussions • Work Stress
Professional Growth & Development	Perception of a lack of training or clarity. Professional development item. Training during the educational process.	• Perception of a lack of training or clarity • Professional development item • Training during the educational process
Boundaries & Balance	Implementation of boundary or balance strategy	• Implementation of boundary or balance strategy • Teacher turnover

Thematic Code Categorization. The categorization of codes was based on relationship and connection (Braun & Clark, 2006) to provide a deeper understanding of the association between the codes and to help present the overarching themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The codebook of original emotional codes (see Appendix H) was examined and placed into categories based on each code’s connection to the funding process and its relationship to the

research questions (Braun & Clark, 2006). The iterative cycle of progression allowed the development of the primary themes to come directly from the narratives, keeping them authentic and rooted to the original perspectives (Vears, 2022). The primary themes that evolved from the data were (1) program impact and mission, (2) roles, relationships, and support, (3) navigating systems and strategies, (4) professional growth and development, and (5) boundaries and balance.

Theme Development. The categories were examined and refined to achieve a sense of comprehensive inclusivity (Braun & Clark, 2006). Several categories developed quickly because the component codes were very similar, such as *system navigation and strategies* and *roles, relationships, and support*. *Professional growth and development* is appropriately named as the category contains the *professional development* code, *lack of training or clarity*, and *educational process training*. The codes of *boundaries and balance* and *teacher turnover* were more difficult. At first glance, there did not appear to be a connection between the two codes. Separate categories were made for each code. After reflection and consideration, *teacher turnover* is a decision made by the educator. An educator's decision to leave a position is a real boundary they set in response to the situation. The codes dealing with *boundaries and balance*, and *turnover* were placed under the theme titled *boundaries and balance*. The remaining two codes, *impact on program & student learning* and *personal contribution of finances and time*, were examined for their relationship to the idea of personal mission. The narratives discussed what each educator believed they should do to complete their job successfully. Ensuring students had enough to eat, making sure there were enough instruments in the school inventory, being inclusive of all who were interested, and offering extracurricular activities based on perceived program needs were

all directly related to each educator's personal mission. This observation led to the final theme being titled *mission and impact*.

Member Checking

Participants reviewed their coded interview transcripts for accuracy of words, meaning, and intended meaning. They were also asked to check the coded emotional observations to identify any area that may have been misinterpreted during coding. Several participants responded with requests to clarify statements or elaborate on a specific point. Two of the participants requested further redactions for anonymity. This process validated my observations as the researcher and increased the trustworthiness and credibility of the interpretations and observations. Through this process, participants were empowered to add additional insights and take ownership of their own narratives to enrich the data. The transparency and reflexivity of member checking were used to request feedback and adapt any inconsistencies with interpretation. P3 requested four changes and corrections for meaning, clarity, and interpretation. P2 requested specific content to be removed from pages 6 and 7 of the transcripts. The other participants acknowledged receipt of their transcripts but did not provide additional feedback or corrections, which implied acceptance of the interview data.

Summary

This qualitative descriptive study explored how instrumental music educators in Title I schools describe their experiences with the funding process, the emotional connections observed during its recall, and the strategies used to navigate it. Eight instrumental music educators participated in semi-structured Zoom interviews that utilized open-ended questions to gather data. The Tactiq program was used to transcribe the Zoom interviews, and then Microsoft Word was used to format the transcripts. The data were initially open-coded, line by line, for

inductively developed emotional tones, which were rigorously reflected upon. The developed categories include (1) positive achievement, (2) positive relational, (3) eustress, (4) engaged, (5) negative achievement, (6) negative relational, (7) distress, and (8) disengaged. A second round of coding identified thematic material based on the interview context and elements of the funding process. The primary themes include (1) mission & impact, (2) roles/relationships & support, (3) navigating systems & strategies, (4) professional growth & development, (5) boundaries & balance. Patterns and connections were identified between emotional tone and the themes that emerged.

Member-checking of the coded transcripts was used for trustworthiness. A reflexive journal (see Appendix L) was also maintained throughout the interview and coding processes. Confidentiality and informed consent forms were strictly observed at all stages of data collection and analysis. The following chapter presents the findings of the major themes and categories, along with their connection to the research questions.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This narrative inquiry was designed to explore the detailed experiences of instrumental music educators working in Title I schools, with the intention of uncovering (1) how instrumental music educators at Title I schools describe their experiences with the funding process, (2) what emotional connections are observed while recalling elements of the funding process, and (3) what strategies are employed to navigate and cope with the funding process. The study aimed to document the primary themes within the lived experience of the funding process and to illuminate the emotional landscape, uncovering coping mechanisms that shape educators' day-to-day realities in under-resourced environments.

The national Title I designation plays an important role in supplementing lower-socioeconomic-status communities (Wells, 2009). Even with the federal Title I financial support, many schools still face barriers to providing adequate materials and instruments for music programs (Hobby, 2004). The responsibility for bridging these gaps often lands on instrumental music educators, who are required to find creative solutions to fund their programs (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). These stressors of operating an instrumental music program in a Title I school are immense and overwhelming (Thompson, 2017), and the stressors take a negative toll on educators (Turner & Garvis, 2023). The anxiety related to the work environment is detrimental to health and well-being (Steyn & Kamper, 2006). The pressures of teaching require coping strategies for healthy emotional management (Savage & Woloshyn, 2022). Counterproductive and maladaptive coping strategies have a negative impact and have been linked to increased risk of educator burnout, difficulty managing daily instructional demands (Hastings & Brown, 2002), and difficulty managing the overall job workload (Cancio et al., 2018).

Findings

The study aimed to address specific research questions by gathering data on the lived experience of instrumental music educators as they describe their experiences with the funding process, the emotional connections observed during recall, and the strategies they used to navigate and cope with it. The findings are presented in the following format: (1) participant demographics, (2) data collection, (3) analysis overview, and (4) results organized by research questions. The trustworthiness of the data was validated through member checking, reflexivity, and triangulation to confirm the findings (Rose & Johnson, 2020) and to connect them to the themes (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Participant Demographics

The instrumental music educators ranged from 1-4 years of teaching experience to 20+ years of classroom experience. Some of the teachers held advanced educational degrees or experience from outside the classroom, such as union representation or previous experience as an administrator. Various demographic factors were collected, including school demographic information (urban, suburban, rural) and the home state of their current teaching position. All other information was removed to protect confidentiality. All eight educators taught in Title I schools at the time of their interview.

Demographic data were collected through an initial interest survey (see Appendix C). The initial survey and semi-structured interview questions gathered data from the participants for the following areas: teaching experience, level of education, school demographics, and course load. Table 4.1 shows the participant ID, the state where their school is located, their teaching experience, the highest level of education, and the school's demographic information (urban, suburban, or rural).

Table 4.1 presents a descriptive summary of the participant demographics:

Table 4.1. Instrumental Music Educator Participant Demographic Data

Participant ID	School State	Years of Experience	Roles & Training	Level of Education	School Demographic
P1	CA	10-19	Teacher	Bachelor's	Urban
P2	IL	20+	Teacher/Advanced Education Degree	Doctoral	Suburban
P3	ND	20+	Teacher/Administrative Experience	Doctoral	Rural
P4	TX	5-9	Teacher/Music Performance Degrees	Master's	Urban
P5	TX	5-9	Teacher	Bachelor's	Rural
P6	CA	5-9	Teacher	Masters in Progress	Urban
P7	AL	1-4	Teacher	Bachelor's	Rural
P8	IL	10-19	Teacher	Bachelor's	Suburban

Specific school names and locations were removed to protect participant confidentiality, but the mix of teaching experience and school demographics was balanced as shown in Table 4.2 and Table 4.3. One educator held previous administrative experience. Another teacher had an advanced education degree. Two educators were either obtaining or already had a master's degree. There was a balance between early and late career stages and between urban and rural locations.

Effort was made to ensure representation from all school demographic groupings. The mix was split equally between rural and urban schools, with three in each category. There were two schools that participated from suburban locations. Rural areas included Alabama, Texas, and North Dakota. Illinois provided two suburban school representations, and the urban schools were from California and Texas.

Table 4.2. Balance of Data based on School Demographics

School Demographics	
Urban	3
Suburban	2
Rural	3

The participants in this study represented a broad range of teaching experience. Three teachers had over 20 years of experience in the field, while two had between 10 and 19 years. Three additional participants reported 5 to 9 years of teaching experience, and one had 2 to 4

years. The most experienced teachers held additional responsibilities beyond classroom instruction. The additional roles included serving as a union leader or taking on an administrative position within their district. Several participants were also active as performers in local music ensembles or held organizational and/or leadership roles in area non-profit groups. These varied experiences added depth and perspective to their understanding of the funding process and the range of available resources, which enriched the insights they brought to this study.

Table 4.3. Balance of Data based on Years of Teacher Experience

Years of Teacher Experience	
20+ Years	3
10-19 Years	2
5-9 Years	3
2-4 Years	1

Semi-Structured Interviews. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted over Zoom. The interviews lasted 36 to 87 minutes each. An Interview Guide (see Appendix D) served as the protocol for the interviews. Transcripts ranged from 9 to 25 pages. Information for each interview is available in Table 4.4. Each transcript was formatted in Microsoft Word. It was then cleaned to remove repeated words, grammatical errors, and redundant or unnecessary language (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The transcripts were saved with a numerical identifier for analysis (see Appendix E). All transcripts were sent to the participants with a member checking deadline for their review and approval.

Table 4.4. Interview and Transcript Data

Participant ID	Interview Date	Interview Length	Transcript Pages
P1	12/16/25	66 Minutes	12
P2	12/31/25	94 Minutes	24
P3	12/31/25	58 Minutes	17
P4	1/6/26	49 Minutes	12
P5	1/12/26	41 Minutes	12
P6	1/12/26	69 Minutes	16
P7	1/13/26	36 Minutes	9
P8	1/14/26	87 Minutes	25

Connecting the Primary Themes and Code Categories to RQ1 & RQ2

Table 4.5 shows the themes in relation to the research questions. It provides a concise overview of the study's analytical structure and how each research question was addressed through the development of the primary themes and the code categories. The comprehensive approach offers the practical and emotional dimensions of educators' experiences with the funding process and the diverse ways they reacted to, adjusted to, and coped with the circumstances.

The alignment of question one, which explores the lived experiences of the funding process, shows five primary themes that were identified as the educators described their navigation of the complexities of funding in their environments. For research question two, the focus is on the emotional associations observed during the recall process. Eight categories were developed: positive achievement, positive relational, eustress, engaged, negative achievement, negative relational, distress, and disengaged. These categories capture the broad spectrum of associated emotions that the educators experienced as they discussed confronting their program funding process.

Table 4.5. Primary Themes & Emotional Code Categories for RQ1 & RQ2

Research Questions	Primary Themes (PT) & Code Categories (CC)
RQ1. How do instrumental music educators in Title I schools describe their experiences with the funding process?	PT: Mission & Impact PT: Roles, Relationships, & Support PT: Navigating Systems & Strategies PT: Professional Development & Growth PT: Boundaries & Balance
RQ2. What emotional connections are observed while recalling elements of the funding process?	CC: Positive Achievement CC: Positive Relational CC: Eustress CC: Engaged CC: Negative Achievement CC: Negative Relational CC: Distress CC: Disengaged

The findings in Table 4.5 demonstrate how the study's coding process systematically addressed the themes from within the participants' funding experiences while also highlighting the emotional landscape of the interview responses. The interplay between why the educators do what they do, how they experience their roles, and the emotions that arise from their work is clearly shown within this aligned framework.

Aggregated Scene Development

In planning the scenes for *Voices at the Roundtable*, relevant literature advocating for creative and immersive approaches to presenting qualitative data was consulted (Batty & Baker, 2017; Bourgeois-Bougrine et al., 2014). Methods that extend beyond traditional reporting were sought to authentically represent participants' realities (Lee et al., 2016). The objective was to vividly convey the perspectives of instrumental music educators and enhance the reader's immersive understanding. Findings were structured as interactive roundtable dialogues, organized by primary themes. Participant statements, experiences, and viewpoints were synthesized and aggregated into concise, convergent scenes. Because educators frequently revisited similar ideas or echoed one another's sentiments during their interviews, related responses were combined and abbreviated to provide focused, clear representations of each theme. Although these screenplay moments do not constitute verbatim quotations or conversations, every line is directly derived from participant data. The use of Educator A, B, C, etc. indicates that these voices are collective rather than attributed to any single individual. Presenting the findings in a roundtable format demonstrates how the convergence of perspectives and data can build consensus in a group setting, offering readers an engaging and holistic view.

Research Question 1 - Voices at the Roundtable: Funding Navigation

The first research question for this study was, “How do instrumental music educators in Title I schools describe their experiences with the funding process?” From semi-structured interviews with eight instrumental music educators in Title I schools, five primary themes emerged. The educators discussed their experiences through (1) mission & impact, (2) roles, relationships, & support, (3) navigating systems & strategies, (4) professional development & growth, and (5) boundaries & balance.

To present each of the primary themes, the screenplay format is revisited, but this time as an educator roundtable. This approach aligns with the phenomenological framework of the study and allows the instrumental music educators to share their experiences and perspectives with one another in a conversational format. This illustrates the comparative and overlapping nature, while highlighting similarities, differences, and tensions between participants’ perspectives. All parts of the conversation are aggregated directly from participant responses.

Each roundtable scene is organized around one of the primary themes that emerged from the data. Within each scene, I synthesized participant statements as aggregated parts to make a whole, rather than quoting the educators directly. This provided clarity and organization as all of the participants individually came to the same convergence. Accompanying each roundtable conversation, I provide an overview of analytic commentary. This serves to contextualize the dialogue, highlight patterns, and draw connections between the aggregated voices. To further support the validity of the codes and themes, I include frequency tables for the code categories that show up within each thematic category. In addition, quotation summaries are organized in a table that supports the individual participant responses for each theme that were utilized in the roundtable.

The multilayered structure of combining roundtable scenes, analytic commentary, frequency counts, and tables of aggregated quotation summaries guides the reader through the findings and clarifies how themes and codes were developed. Readers are encouraged to engage with the roundtable scenes as immersive windows into the participants' realities, but also to find the analytic commentary and frequency data to ground their understanding within the analysis framework.

Primary Theme 1: Mission & Impact. Mission and impact emerged as a primary theme. Every educator expressed a personal calling and a sense of responsibility for ensuring access to music. This roundtable brings their voices together to demonstrate how their sense of mission drives their motivation.

Setting:

A conference room, late afternoon. Eight instrumental music educators gather around a weathered table. The researcher sits nearby, occasionally prompting the group but mostly just listening as the conversation flows.

- - - (*Begin dialogue*)- - -

INTERVIEWER

Let's talk about why you do what you do. What drives you to keep finding ways to make it work?

[Pause. The instrumental music educators look at one another. Who will go first?]

EDUCATOR A

[...leans forward, making eye contact with the others around the table. Using their hands to emphasize the response.]

Honestly, it's the kids. I've gone on Facebook Marketplace, found used instruments, cleaned them up, brought them to school. If someone wants to play, I'll find them an instrument.

EDUCATOR B

[...smiles wryly. Looks down at the table in while nodding in agreement.]

Same here. I've probably donated three or four trumpets, a few clarinets. The first year, I spent \$1,700 of my own money on reeds. No one explained the process. I just did it, because the kids needed to play. I couldn't do my job without those things, at least not in the way I felt it should be done.

EDUCATOR C

[...chuckles, but with a hint of fatigue. Looking around the group.]

... don't get me started. Marching season, if the boosters couldn't cover the cost of food to feed the kids, I'd buy breakfast for the whole marching band. \$700... It adds up. But you do what you have to do. The kids had to eat breakfast. I didn't feel right about not including food.

EDUCATOR D

[...hesitant, but with pride.]

I've bought a dozen instruments out of pocket over two years. Probably \$1,500. I just couldn't tell a kid, "Sorry, you can't participate. I fundamentally believe that everyone should be able to join who wants to participate."

EDUCATOR E

[...voice tightens, tension and frustration clearly observable as they address the group...]

For me, it's not just about money. I mean the financial piece is a huge issue, but it's also about time and hours worked; I worked over 400 hours that I wasn't paid for when my district promised I would be. That's over \$10,000 out of my own pocket. I'm currently in a grievance process with my union over the compensation package. I was told to put in hundreds of extra hours---unpaid. Which I did at the time, because it was right for the program.

EDUCATOR F

[...everyone nods, taking that information in. Educator F sits quietly for a second and then slowly joins the conversation. Conflicted by a sense of pride and overwhelm at the memory ...]

I agree with what you're saying about the gifting of time, but I would say my perspective is more centered on the gifting of talents. I have served my school system through multiple roles, when they have asked. They needed an elementary principal---now keep in mind, this is a very small district--- I agreed. I was elementary principal and music teacher and librarian. They asked for a high school principal, and I said ok, again. For that year, I was high school principal, elementary principal, music teacher, and librarian. Then they needed a superintendent, when he was ready to retire. He said, she knows education. She knows what to do. She can handle it. And I said, no, I cannot. I cannot be the superintendent, the high school principal, the elementary principal, the music teacher, and the librarian. I simply cannot do all those things.

[Nervous laugh in frustration]

But I did. I took on the superintendent role, gave high school principal position to someone else... but I was still wearing all those other hats. The school needed it. There was no one else. I felt called to answer that call.

Analytic Commentary. The mission is non-negotiable. Each educator felt called to respond in an unsustainable way. They describe stepping in financially, logistically, and emotionally. When the system falls short, they take over. These stories showcase resourcefulness in the face of internalized responsibility. Their voices feel heavy with exhaustion, but they are also filled with pride. The sense of accomplishment at achieving an impossible task is palpable on each face. But there is also an underlying anxiety. They have each felt the emotional toll caused by the solution.

Their sacrifices connect them, but their emotional responses differ slightly. Some educators speak with satisfaction and pride, while others exhibit frustration and resentment. Some of the less experienced educators are a little surprised by the scope of personal investment required, while the educators who are more experienced offer their responses in an ingrained, factual manner, “you do what you gotta do” as some say.

The idea of the “more I do, the more I have to do” (P5) is evident in the narratives. We can see in the roundtable that the line between mission and martyrdom is sometimes blurred. The mission to provide music education has driven these educators to great lengths. The weight of the mission is visible in their responses: extreme financial outputs, sustaining multiple roles at personal cost, and emotional investment in their students’ and their programs. When each educator was asked about sustainability, most were unsure.

Frequency Chart and Aggregated Summary. The frequency chart in Table 4.6 shows that *engaged* and *negative achievement* were the most frequently coded emotional categories. This reflects the active and persistent efforts of the instrumental music educators. *Positive achievement* and *positive relational* codes were present, but they occurred less often. The presence of these codes, even if less frequent, indicates that moments containing pride and supportive relationships were often tempered by frustration and obstacles. Distress and disengaged were rarely coded for many participants in relation to theme one. P2 and P3 showed a more balanced distribution between positive and negative codes while other participants, such as P6 and P8, were slightly more negative. This distribution demonstrates the emotional complexity and the variability of individual experience among the participants.

Table 4.6. Frequency Chart of Code Categories for PT 1: Mission & Impact

Participant	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
P1	5	4	5	22	12	0	0	4
P2	20	17	2	23	15	0	1	5
P3	14	7	1	20	8	2	1	6
P4	7	9	0	12	9	0	4	2
P5	6	1	0	11	13	0	0	0
P6	1	3	3	9	19	2	0	0
P7	0	0	0	5	2	0	0	0
P8	8	2	0	8	20	3	1	0

Table 4.7. Aggregated Quotation Summary for Theme 1

Participant	Quotes Relating to Theme 1: Mission & Impact
P1	"I have probably given three to four trumpets to the school over the years. I've given three clarinets to the school over the years. I make sure they're good to use, they're safe to use. I clean them out, I fix them a little bit, and I bring them to the school."
P7	"I've gone to antique shops, thrift stores. I've gone to this website called Hungry for Music, where you can request an instrument. ...I've bought out of my own pocket, probably a dozen instruments for kids. ...the students are my top priority. I want them to be able to be in the program and not have to worry about renting an instrument or trying to find an instrument that's out of their budget."
P1	"For the first few years... I ended up buying \$1,700 worth of reeds out of pocket because they didn't show me how to buy things. ...I've probably given three to four trumpets to the school over the years. I've given three clarinets to the school over the years. ...I bring them to the school. I just did it, because the kids needed to play. I couldn't do my job without those things, at least not in the way I felt it should be done."
P5	"So I've spent many marching band Saturdays spending my own personal money to get them breakfast. ...I probably spent about \$800 on kolaches and donuts during marching season out of my personal time. Just to save money. You do what you have to do. The kids had to eat breakfast."
P7	"I've bought out of my own pocket, probably a dozen instruments for kids. I just couldn't tell a kid, 'Sorry, you can't participate.' I fundamentally believe that everyone should be able to join who wants to participate."
P6	"It's also about time and hours worked; I worked over 400 hours that I wasn't paid for when my district promised I would be. That's over \$10,000 out of my own pocket. I'm currently in a grievance process... I was told to put in hundreds of extra hours---unpaid. Which I did at the time, because it was right for the program. It's not just about money. ...it's also about time and hours worked."
P3	"After a couple of years, I added librarian to that. ...Then, 2013, the elementary principal suddenly retired... So I added elementary principal to my things. ...So for that year, I was high school principal, elementary principal, music teacher and librarian. ...And so I said, no, I cannot. I cannot be the superintendent, the high school principal, the elementary principal, the music teacher, and the librarian. I simply cannot do all those things. ...But I did. ...The school needed it. There was no one else. I felt called to answer that call."
P2	"I still drop a little bit on reeds and oil and things like that from time to time, but not a lot."

Primary Theme 2: Roles, Relationships, & Support. All participants discussed the need for support and connections with administrators, peers, boosters, and partners. Isolation was a common theme among all participants. Some of the educators reported being the only music

teacher in their building. Despite this, there was a strong emphasis on seeking support, relationships, and mentorships to be successful and content. This roundtable conversation highlights on their prioritization of seeking relationships with others.

- - - (*Begin dialogue*)- - -

INTERVIEWER

What about support? Can you discuss the relationships you built with colleagues, administration, or community?

[The mood lightens. This is a subject that brings joy and happiness. It is instantly visible on everyone's face.]

EDUCATOR B

[...smiling, comfortable...]

Honestly, sharing is essential. Our art teacher, she and I will sit down, and we'll look at what we can share. What can we do? Is there joint programming? We have many elementary programs where we've split the budget on props and costumes simply because it gives her students a chance to explore those areas.

[Shrugs, and shows contentment]

Sometimes it feels like patchwork, but it works.

EDUCATOR E

[Suddenly joins in. Grateful. Leans back and places both hands directly on the table in a matter-of-fact manner.]

I don't know what I'd do without our band boosters. They really help out when they can... like this year, they're paying a thousand dollars for a pre-UIL for both my junior high band and my high school band. Cause if not, my budget couldn't take it. The costs for contests, travel, uniforms...

[Shakes head and with concern and adds]

It's just too much to cover alone.

EDUCATOR B

[Nods. Waits a second to let the weight of the previous comment settle. Then energetically redirects to showcase a few systems that have been put in place.]

One of the best things we've done is partner with our principals and the principals in our athletic conference to swap crates of music every month. I actually started that system about 19 years ago, and now when our principals and athletic directors all meet, they're carrying a crate to trade with others. It's a simple way for all 17 schools to share music resources, save money, and make sure every program, no matter the budget, has access to new repertoire.

[This idea is surprising to everyone else and met with interest and excitement as several educators indicate that they approve of this system.]

It's saved us a fortune over the years.

EDUCATOR G

[Enthusiastically and with a reflective tone.]

For me, it all started with building relationships.

[Making eye contact with the others around the table.]

When I took my job, the previous director hadn't had good relationships with anyone around the school. I decided to fix that immediately. I put a smile on my face. I introduced myself and made those relationships, then they were willing to work with me. And so now that I'm two years in, I have complete support from my administration. They will do whatever they can within their means to make sure that the things that I need can happen. I really feel that support now.

[Everyone nods in support.]

EDUCATOR B

[...softer this time; hesitant...]

And support isn't just about program finances. It's about community. I have a fairly solid faith community. I attend the Catholic Church on campus every Sunday night at nine. It's kind of a good end to one week and a good start to the next. That's helped me stay grounded through the chaos.

Analytic Commentary. None of these educators could do their work in isolation. The sharing of resources was emphasized by almost all participants, but was heavily promoted by P2. Several systems were developed and utilized for sharing resources and professional development support for other music educators, both within the district, and within the athletic conference. Everyone shared the sentiment that a web of supportive relationships not only sustains the program, but helps sustain them emotionally. Emphasis was placed on the ability to reach out for help and to collaborate with others. For some, it was a survival strategy, and for others, it was a sense of emotional support. No matter whether it was a relationship that was built on day one, or a growing sense of trust between colleagues that was developed over many years, the underlying message was always: these supportive relationships are essential.

Frequency Chart and Aggregated Summary. The frequency chart in Table 4.8 shows the emotions that were most frequent in the *roles, relationships & support* theme as described by the participants. Most of the participants reported frequent positive relational experiences, highlighting the importance of supportive colleagues, community, and administration in their work environment. Negative relational and achievement codes were also common as participants reflected on challenges and emotional costs that accompanied these roles. Few participants reported high levels of distress or disengagement throughout this theme, as they remained emotionally invested throughout the discussion.

Table 4.8. Frequency Chart of Code Categories for PT 2: Roles, Relationships, & Support

Participant	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
P1	5	8	3	14	8	3	0	1
P2	38	50	3	42	30	7	8	5
P3	35	48	5	50	30	6	7	8
P4	8	25	1	19	13	7	2	6
P5	10	13	0	26	29	0	0	2
P6	5	5	1	15	32	1	1	4
P7	1	4	1	7	4	1	0	2
P8	10	21	5	42	46	11	1	1

Table 4.9. Aggregated Quotation Summary for Theme 2

Participant	Quotes Relating to Theme 2: Roles, Relationships, & Support
P2	“Our art teacher, she and I will sit down and we'll look, every year we look, what can we share? What can we do? Is there joint programming like we've done? many elementary programs where we've split the budget on props and costumes and things like that simply because it gives her students a chance to explore those areas, but no um we work together... Sometimes it feels like patchwork, but it works.”
P5	“My band boosters really help out when they can, like this year they're paying, you know, a thousand dollars for a pre UIL for both my junior high and my high school band. Cause if not, my budget couldn't take it. I probably spent about \$800 on kolaches and donuts during marching season out of my personal time. ...My band boosters are wonderful. It's just too much to cover alone.”
P2	“We have a very extensive exchange system for sheet music in our athletic conference, all 17 schools. We are swapping music crates every month. I started that system a couple of decades. Well, when I started about 19 years ago, I would say. So when our principals and athletic directors meet, they're all carrying a crate to swap with others. So we just, yeah, it's really simple. It saved us a fortune.”
P7	“So when I got here and I had a smile on my face and I'd introduced myself and, you know, made those relationships, they were willing to work with me. And so now that I'm two years in, I have complete support from my administration. They will do whatever they can within their means to make sure that the things that I need can happen. ...I really feel that support now.”
P2	“And support isn't just about program finances. It's about community. I have a fairly solid faith community. I attend the Catholic Church on campus every Sunday night at nine. It's kind of a good end to one week and a good start to the next. That's helped me stay grounded through the chaos.”
P1	“I feel like a lot of teachers have really started supporting us and want us to do well—they'll tell me, ‘you know I was in band... it was great. When are we getting a marching band?’ ...finding ways to let them do that is what I'm working on.”
P3	“It is good to talk to other people that are in the same line of business that you are because they're going to understand better than anybody else, even your spouse, unless your spouse is in that line of work as well.”
P6	“I have several other friends in the school and we communicate. All of the staff, quite honestly, are really burnt out and really frustrated. So we do communicate.”

Primary Theme 3: Navigating Systems & Strategies. The navigation of funding systems within the local schools was heavily discussed. Every district had its own requirements

and procedures. It quickly became apparent that state regulation and district policy play a very large role in the funding process. Understanding and knowledge of the local and state systems repeatedly surfaced and were extremely important to those who felt comfortable with their school's funding process. The following roundtable conversation focuses on weaving together elements of funding systems, state regulation, transparency, and planning.

- - - *(Begin dialogue)* - - -

INTERVIEWER

How do you navigate the system in your district, and what role does state regulation play?

[The educators look around, not sure who will speak first.]

EDUCATOR A

[Nods; takes a deep breath. Concern is obvious while speaking.]

Well, in California, we have the Williams Act. That means students aren't required to purchase any school supplies. If we ask them to get a supply, we have to provide it. It helps, but it's also a huge responsibility. Especially when the budget is dismal and can't keep up with student need.

EDUCATOR F

[Leans forward, making eye contact with the others around the table. Frustrated and irritated.]

And we also have something called Prop 28. It's supposed to be supplemental... not supplanting. But they're cutting fine arts and performing arts funding and using Prop 28 to fill the gap. When we tell the district this, they don't take it seriously. It's not what the law intended. It's very frustrating.

EDUCATOR B

[Smiles and raises hand. Pride and appreciation obvious.]

I'm lucky. We always pass a balanced budget here. Every department's budget stays about the same, unless you don't spend it. I use mine every year, so they never slash me. To get more, though, I have to provide the data—numbers, sections, justification. It's all about making the case.

EDUCATOR A

[Shrugs. Jealous and frustrated.]

That sounds nice. Where I started, there was no budget for the program or almost anything. The superintendent would just say, "make a wish list request, and I'll decide." Sometimes I'd put in a wish list and get nothing back all. That happened two years in a row. It was frustrating. Two years with no budget. Even now, I can't use the summer to plan for the fall because I have no idea what will be purchased off my wish list. If there is one thing I have learned, it's that there is money—it's just access to the money that's the issue.

EDUCATOR E

[Nods in agreement.]

Transparency is a huge issue.

[A frustrated hand pushes hair back off of their face.]

It's all public information online, but the way it's divided up could be a lot more clear. Our district had some shady stuff before I got here, but now teachers can see their budget accounts. Even so, sometimes you have to file public records requests to see how it's really split. That's a lot of paperwork and red tape just to find out if the records are accurate and where wiggle room might be in the budget. We have had success so far, but only because a few members of my booster group pursued it and did all the paperwork.

EDUCATOR F

[Quickly chimes in. Intense concern and eagerness.]

It's not just about access—it's about advocacy. If you want your students to have what they need, you have to include advocacy in your job description. You're not paid for it, you're not thanked for it, but it is absolutely essential because the students simply won't be able to access those things if you don't do it.

EDUCATOR H

[Agreeing with the others and making eye contact with all.]

And you can't do it alone. I'm the main advocate, but I have to have students and parents on board. You need a team.

EDUCATOR C

[Leaning forward and nodding.]

Exactly. You have to be visible. Perform, put things in the newspaper, let people know what you're doing. You have to be out in the community. What you're doing has to be seen.

EDUCATOR H

[Nods head as well and speaks thoughtfully.]

When we think about advocating, it's really about removing the emotion and focusing on what's best for kids. If it's not improving learning, why do it? And navigating the process is all about patience and planning. There's no magic number. Sometimes, it's just catching someone in the right place at the right time.

EDUCATOR D

[Nods occasionally. Listens thoughtfully, then confidently adds the following line..]

There is no funding for my program. I receive zero dollars from my campus and my district fine arts department. All of our district funding are funneled to theater and dance. The orchestra and the band haven't had school funding at all in the years I have been working there. I'm completely on my own... so we'll fundraise once every couple of years. We will raise five, \$6,000, and I will make that last forever. I make that last multiple years.

[Everyone is uncomfortable and quiet. A brief silence as they take in Educator D's response.]

EDUCATOR B

[In agreement and with conviction.]

Advanced planning is everything. 1, 3, 5 year plans. I keep a wish list and I plan for everything. I plan for every possible answer—yes, no, maybe. I build up resources over time. That's how you get things done.

Analytic Commentary. As mentioned around this table, it's obvious that funding systems are tricky. State regulations like the Williams Act and Prop 28 set the stage, but they are followed by the issues of transparency, district policy, and advocating as an individual on behalf of the program. All of these areas shape the direction of what happens and what gets built. For some, planning and data are enough to secure resources; for others, the process is not as clear. It's unpredictable, or even adversarial. The recurring theme is that patience, persistence, and public presence are as important as the laws and policies that guide funding.

To navigate this landscape, it requires more than simply knowing the rules. This process demands advocacy, adaptability, and a willingness to engage both systems and other people. For several of these educators, success is not about the dollar amount that is offered from the school system; it's more about the strength of the strategy they choose to utilize as well as their support system.

Frequency Chart and Aggregated Summary. The frequency chart in Table 4.10 shows that the *engaged* code is extremely high for almost all participants, especially P2, P3, P5, and P8. The *negative achievement* code also appeared frequently for P6, P8, P1, P5, and P3. The

educators often encountered setbacks and challenges while navigating school systems and funding processes. *Positive achievement* is present for most participants, but it was usually lower than the negative codes, as the participants indicated that there were successes, but they were less frequent, and they had to fight for them. The *distress* code appeared, but was not overwhelming. Stress was a factor for all participants, but all were actively engaged in plans to move forward. P2, P3, P5, and P8 showed high *engaged* code use as they were highly active in their system navigation process. There is almost an absence of *eustress* and *positive relational* code usage, as participants did not display many moments of hopefulness or strong relationships that were positive throughout the data for primary theme three.

Table 4.10. Frequency Chart of Code Categories for PT 3: Navigating Systems & Strategies

Participant	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
P1	5	0	4	12	27	1	2	15
P2	43	28	2	50	28	3	3	21
P3	18	13	2	50	27	10	4	12
P4	4	16	2	16	23	3	2	3
P5	14	7	0	37	32	1	0	8
P6	8	6	4	24	72	6	5	4
P7	4	6	3	22	5	1	0	2
P8	30	14	4	67	85	8	3	4

Table 4.11. Aggregated Quotation Summary for Theme 3

Participant	Quotes Relating to Theme 3: Navigating Systems & Strategies
P1	“In California, what that looks like is we have something called the Williams Act, which means that students are not required to purchase any school supplies. If we ask them to get a supply, we have to provide it, meaning in these band and orchestra classes, we have a lot, lot, lot of school instruments.”
P6	“In California, we actually have something called Prop 28. ...the Williams Act... If we ask them to get a supply, we have to provide it.”
P8	“We always pass a balanced budget since I've been here and the big thing is every department has a budget that more or less stays the same—unless there's a pattern of not using it—I use my budget every year, so they're never going to slash me...To get more money over the years...they look at numbers, they look at sections, and that determines what we need...it's all about making the case.”
P6	“In California, we actually have something called Prop 28. ...it's supposed to be supplemental, not supplanting. And they are instead cutting fine arts and performing arts funding and supplanting it. And when we tell them this, they don't take it as seriously as they should... legal action is likely to come.”
P3	“...there was no budget set for the program...the superintendent would be like, well, you just make a request...”
P1	“There was no budget set for the program or for almost anything.. the superintendent would be like, well, you just make a request and requisition it to me and I'll decide whether it's good or not...I would really feel better with an amount so that I would know if I was getting close...I put in a wishlist...and maybe I hear back...maybe I hear nothing. It's not necessarily about funding. It's about access to that funding.”
P5	“It is all public information online, but the way it's divided up could be a little more transparent. ...sometimes you have to do a public records request to see how it's divided up...We have had success so far, but only because a few members of my booster group pursued it and did all the paperwork.”
P6	“...you need to include advocacy in your job description. You are not paid for it. You are often not thanked for it, but it absolutely has to be included because they simply won't be able to access those things if you don't do it.”
P5	“I'm the main advocate, but I cannot be the only one advocating for my program. I have to have students who want to advocate. I have to have parents. ...once you get the community on your side you can get a lot more accomplished than being you know that's, especially as a sole director, you have to kind of be a face in the community.”
P3	“Yes, but our main way to advocate, I think, is just being visible. You just need to be out there and performing and letting people see you putting things in the newsletter, you know, or the newspaper, if your town has a newspaper and things like that...During my concerts, I'm almost always telling them what we're doing, what we're working on.”
P8	“...when we think about advocating for things, it's really removing the emotion from it and just focusing on being a hundred percent kid-centered on everything. This is what we need for kids. This is what's best for kids...navigating the process is all about patience and planning...Sometimes, it's just catching someone in the right place at the right time.”
P4	“There is no funding for my program. I receive zero dollars from my campus and my district fine arts department. ...I'm completely on my own... so we'll fundraise once every couple of years, we'll raise five, \$6,000, and I will make that last forever. I can make that last multiple years.”
P2	“The old superintendent had a very much put it down on paper. And if we like it, we'll fund it method. This new super I love because she says she said right off the bat, give me a one year, three year, five year plan for repertoire, for equipment, for performance fees... Advanced planning is everything. Knowing what we're going to do down the road and making a case for it and buying pieces of it as we go.”
P1	“...there was no budget set for the program or for almost anything. ...the superintendent would be like, well, you just make a request and requisition it to me and I'll decide whether it's good or not.”

P3 “...I just always kind of was careful about how many requests I had...I could buy this with title money instead of the general fund and things like that. ...I would just approve it and give it to the business manager who was also the secretary and she would secure the funds. So small school again, very informal process.”

Primary Theme 4: Professional Growth & Development. Every instrumental music educator indicated an interest in training and development, especially for new teachers. Some directly expressed their own needs and how they could be filled by meaningful professional development, while other teachers emphasized using their skillset and their own progress to help host professional development for nurturing current and future educators. This roundtable highlights the strong feelings that were shared regarding training.

- - - (*Begin dialogue*)- - -

INTERVIEWER

Let's talk about training. It could be knowledge from the teaching degree training and or modern professional development offerings.

EDUCATOR A

[Leans forward. Bright eyes, but a little tired.]

You know, I would love it if when teachers who are new to California or new in general were given a walkthrough on the funding process or some sort of education about the funding process... I would just love a two-hour tutorial on here's how money works. It feels like we're all just fumbling through the dark.

EDUCATOR F

[Tapping fingers restlessly against the edge of the table.]

That's exactly it. We did not at all get whatever is in the middle of, 'okay, you feel really passionate about this. Here's how you talk to and administrator to make it more equitable.' Or., 'How do you talk to another colleague to convince them why it's important that these students get access to this field trip scholarship funding?'

[Voice a bit exasperated.]

Like, how do you actually advocate for getting more funds—how do you work with less funds?

[Pauses, shaking head.]

We didn't get the "how to," we only got the 'what is it and the why you should care' info.

EDUCATOR C

[Leaning back, arms crossed. A small half smile, nodding.]

No training for the financial process. None. Not my bachelor's, not my master's. There was nothing about funding anything. Nope. I learned by doing, and usually by making mistakes and learning in the process.

[Pauses, voice softens a bit.]

Honestly, I didn't really get any training on the financial side until I moved into administrative work—and even then, I relied on my business manager quite a bit. I still felt like there were things I didn't fully understand. I know from my administrative experience that if your admin says no to a request, it may not be because they don't have the funds. There is a lot of red tape and a lot of hoops to jump through ... maybe they just need to clarify some of those areas before agreeing.

EDUCATOR H

[Looks down at their hands for a moment and then looks up to respond.]

Same for me. We had to do a project in a class where we had to come up with a budget. It taught us to go look online, it taught us how much these things cost, but it didn't really teach us how the budget worked. That was... it was great, but not every place you're going to end up will be able to hand you a budget and say, 'Hey, I'm going to fund this.'

EDUCATOR B

[Voice filled with teacherly reassurance. Posture attentive.]

With the EdD, I got some training in financial processes, but what I see with younger teachers is they don't know how to ask the right questions. They don't know how to assess their needs properly.

[Voice gentle, but firm.]

A lot of younger teachers I've run into will say, "I wish I had this, I wish I had that," and I want to say, "But you have these things, and your kids can do these things." Focus on that first.

EDUCATOR C

[Nods, voice thoughtful.]

Even though I had that as an administrator, I really felt that as a lack. I felt because I'd never taken an accounting class of any kind... and yes, I had a business manager to do that for me. But I even felt like, as an administrator, I wish I understood finances better than even the classes I had covered.

EDUCATOR G

[Sits quietly, smiles shyly... then leans inward to share with the group.]

For me, my music education degree was all pedagogically focused. The funding thing is just one of those things you learn on the job. I wish someone had talked about it more during my training.

EDUCATOR D

[Frustrated. Elbows on the table and lightly clapping hands together.]

My district spends an unbelievable amount of money on professional development and training. And this is probably the most controversial part of public education, at least in my district. Professional development is awful. Most of the time, I would say 90% or more. It's someone who's never worked in education that has some kind of thing to sell. And they come present it to us and

claim to have the answers we need. And the teachers just end up tuning it out. It's a giant waste.

Analytic Commentary. We can hear frustration in the voices of all the educators. There is a sense of resignation. Each educator has had to learn the process while doing the process. The educators' body language... the fidgeting, leaning inward... mirrors what their voices sound like. They are willing to learn but are sometimes weary of the process. They are always wishing for practical, real-world, and useful training. Whether early or late in their careers, they all echo the same theme: the *how* of funding is missing from their preparation.

Some educators have obtained advanced degrees, but even those with the highest credentials admit gaps in their understanding. The result is a culture of learning by trial, error, and too often, mistake. Some teachers described making it up as they went, improvising while they learned. These stories show a lack of training that does not prepare them for the realities they face.

Frequency Chart and Aggregated Summary. The *negative achievement* code was most prevalent for primary theme four. The experiences related to professional growth and development were often sources of frustration, unmet expectations, and challenges for the music educators. Most participants expressed feelings of disappointment and concern, along with frustration. *Eustress* was a low-frequency code along with *negative relational*, *distress*, and *disengaged*. The music educators expressed feelings of isolation and stress due to the lack of appropriate professional growth opportunities. The engaged code was lower in this theme when compared to the other themes. Some educators sought their own growth opportunities, but when discussing them, participants were often disappointed. P6 and P8 stood out with high levels of *negative achievement*, followed closely by P1 and P4. P2 had a mostly balanced

positive/negative code level, but it should be noted that P2 was very actively engaged in offering and planning professional development for district, state and surrounding school music educators, as well as teachers within the local conference.

Table 4.12. Frequency Chart of Code Categories for PT 4: Professional Growth & Development

Participant	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
P1	2	0	3	1	21	3	0	2
P2	10	7	0	12	10	3	1	2
P3	0	0	1	4	6	3	2	1
P4	1	1	1	2	14	4	1	1
P5	1	1	0	4	2	0	0	0
P6	2	0	1	5	36	2	0	1
P7	0	0	0	5	1	0	0	0
P8	6	1	0	9	28	4	0	0

Table 4.13. Aggregated Quotation Summary for Theme 4

Participant	Quotes Relating to Theme 4: Professional Growth & Development
P1	"I would just love a two-hour tutorial on here's how money works. ...I would have loved that. That would have been great. ...It feels like we're all just fumbling through the dark."
P6	"We did not at all get whatever is in the middle of, 'okay, you feel really passionate about this. How do you talk to an administrator to make it more equitable?' ...Like, how do you actually advocate for getting more funds—how do you work with less funds? ...We didn't get the 'how to,' we only got the 'what is it and the why you should care' info."
P3	"No training for the financial process. None. Not my bachelor's, not my master's. There was nothing about funding anything. Nope. ...I didn't really get any training on the financial side until I moved into administrative work—and even then, I relied on my business manager quite a bit. I still felt like there were things I didn't fully understand. If your admin says no... there might be some kind of rule or regulation that, that what you want is violating or in the way of, or that they have to check on right now."
P8	"We had to do a project in a class where we had to come up with a budget. It taught us to go look online, it taught us how much these things cost, but it didn't really teach us how the budget worked. That was... it was great, but not every place you're going to be able to hand a budget and say, 'Hey, I'm going to fund this.'"
P2	"With the EdD, I got some training in financial processes, but what I see with younger teachers is they don't know how to ask the right questions. They don't know how to assess their needs properly. ...A lot of younger teachers I've run into will say, 'I wish I had this, I wish I had that,' and I want to say, 'But you have these things, and your kids can do these things.' Focus on that first."
P3	"Even though I had that as an administrator, I really felt that as a lack. I felt because I'd never taken an accounting class of any kind... and yes, I had a business manager to do that for me. But I even felt like, as an administrator, I wish I understood finances better than even the classes I had covered."
P7	"For me, my music education degree was all pedagogically focused. The funding thing is just one of those things you learn on the job. I wish someone had talked about it more during my training."
P4	"My district spends an unbelievable amount of money on professional development. ...Professional development is awful. Most of the time, I would say 90% or more. It's someone who's never worked in education that has some kind of thing to sell. ...And the teachers just end up tuning it out. ...It's a giant waste."
P5	"I didn't know anything about small schools... I learned a lot just by doing it."
P6	"There was a one week long project. So two days of class where we went over budgeting. But that it was like budgeting in a vacuum."
P3	"Not my bachelor's, not my master's. There was nothing about funding anything. Nope."

Primary Theme 5: Boundaries & Balance. There were many boundaries set by instrumental music educators. In another roundtable discussion, the findings illustrated some of their boundaries, the reasoning behind them, and the balance strategies they found meaningful. Items discussed included limiting email access, not bringing work home, leaving at a specific time every day, and making efforts to carve out time for themselves.

- - - (*Begin dialogue*)- - -

INTERVIEWER

Let's go over any boundaries that you've set for yourselves. Are there any balance strategies that you find helpful?

EDUCATOR A

[Gentle voice. Calm and resolute.]

I only check my email like once a week during the summer, which I refuse to put on my phone. I refuse to put my work email on my phone. And when I'm working, I check my email three or four times a day. But when I'm at home for the summer, I check it once a week because I don't want to be thinking about that. I don't want to be worried about my wish list and the items that will be approved or denied for every bit of the summer.

EDUCATOR C

[Nodding. Steady voice in agreement.]

I try not to look at my emails on the weekends. So, I'm trying very hard to have all my work and my stuff done Monday through Friday so that I can have my weekends unless it's a music festival weekend... I don't want to use it to get caught up with things. I haven't 100% been successful with that yet this year, but I have had more weekends off than I used to in the past.

EDUCATOR B

[Smiling softly, stretching legs. Makes eye contact around the table while speaking.]

I don't bring work home. I learned a long time ago not to bring work home. Sometimes I'm at work really late, so I don't bring it home.

[Short pause, then confidently continues.]

But I have another thing I have done, and I think I missed two days this year, and I missed maybe three the year before. But between where I live and the school is a university campus. So I stop, park

my car, and every day, rain, shine, snow, sleet, break or not, I walk the full length of campus and back. It's a little over two miles. I don't care what the weather is. That's my—sometimes it's my decompressing, cry time. Even if it's raining. Almost all of my processing goes into that time.

EDUCATOR D

[Smiles at the others; leans forward]

I'm happiest when I have a really, really, healthy work-life balance. For example, this week is great. I can come to work. I love my job to death. But at 4:30pm, I can turn it off, and I can go home.

EDUCATOR G

[Nods in agreement. Hands folded on the table, a sense of calm.]

Whenever I go home, I make sure that everything is done. I will not answer an email unless it is just urgent at home. If I have to do anything band-related, I try to do it in the middle of the day or closer to the evening, so I don't have to worry about it in the morning or before bed. Most of the time, I try to do a weekly schedule, and I try to do that at school on Monday, and then the whole week is laid out.

EDUCATOR A

[Glances around, voice open and matter-of-fact.]

I have a therapist. I feel like a lot of teachers at my school do. Not for anything extreme, but I feel like a lot of teachers in today's world have a therapist. It's just a good way to talk things out, especially when you're carrying so much.

EDUCATOR B

[Chuckles. Appreciative.]

I've been seeing a therapist once a month, usually for about 20 years. It's only been two different people. It's a good time to just

have those tough discussions. Sometimes it's about work, sometimes about life, but it's always helpful. It lets me reset and not carry everything with me.

EDUCATOR C

[Leans back. Voice reflective and softer.]

During the COVID shutdown, that's when I did start talking with a therapist, which helped, you know, because I got so overwhelmed with so much stuff. I do still talk with a therapist. It was kind of a turning point for me—I realized I needed to put my own oxygen mask on, so to speak.

EDUCATOR F

[Leans in, voice confident and making eye contact around the table. Glances at the interviewer.]

I wish more people would talk about this openly. Therapy isn't about being broken; it's about having a sounding board, someone to help you figure out the right boundaries for yourself. I see a therapist and it really changed the way I approach things. I'm much better at saying no now, or at least at recognizing when I need to.

EDUCATOR B

[Nods, affirming.]

Exactly. It's about building in those routines—whether it's a walk, a regular check-in with a therapist, or just shutting off email—that lets us recharge. If I don't, I know I'm not my best for my students and my colleagues.

Analytic Commentary. The educators' boundary-setting strategies come into focus while the conversation drifted. Refusing to check emails after hours or on summer break, and creating rituals like a daily walk outside to bookend the workday were common strategies. There is also a strong emphasis on therapy as a regular tool and not just a last resort. For several of the educators, therapy is not simply a safety net. It's an active space for thought, reflection, and self-

care. Across the room, there is a sense that boundaries are not only permissible, but essential. The impression was that there were elements of guilt, trial and error, and a sense that these practices are not always easy. For instance, the idea of not checking email... but checking email on a festival weekend. Or not checking email over the summer; but maybe checking it only once a week because they are hoping to find what wish list items have been approved or denied. There were even indications of anxiety and apprehension over the act of opening that email, as it slates the pathway for the entire school year. Even the idea of the outdoor walk happening in rain, sleet, snow, or shine. The commitment is one that is not always easy, but it is evidence of a shift toward boundary setting and sustainability.

These roundtable discussions provide a combination of realities interacting with each other. Each of the primary themes was meaningful to the instrumental music educators in different ways. The next section explores the emotional associations and emotional tones that were observed and coded throughout the narratives.

Frequency Chart and Aggregated Summary. The frequencies in Table 4.14 showed a high number of *engaged* codes. The educators were actively setting and maintaining boundaries and were deliberate in their efforts to seek balance in their professional lives, especially for P8, P5, P4, and P2. The music educators who described successful boundary implementation showed both personal satisfaction and positive relationships with colleagues and family. The negative codes were generally low across all participants. Most of the participants had balance strategies in place or were trying to be proactive to create them. Some of the frustrations discussed arose from recollecting moments of implementation or struggles to figure out their boundaries. P3 and P4 discussed plans for maintaining balance and showed signs of hopefulness and excitement at how the plans were working. P8 stood out as having very high levels of engagement and positive

codes due to active boundaries and strategies for support being successfully put into place. P3 showed a unique pattern of high *eustress* and high *engagement* codes that reflected the energizing feelings the participant had for new and improved boundary-setting. Overall, the educators exhibited feelings of empowerment and well-being derived from their efforts to set boundaries proactively, rather than as a last resort measure.

Table 4.14. Frequency Chart of Code Categories for PT 5: Boundaries & Balance

Participant	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
P1	2	1	0	6	1	0	0	0
P2	5	3	0	14	2	3	2	1
P3	0	0	5	9	0	1	1	0
P4	6	4	3	13	5	1	1	1
P5	1	2	0	15	7	0	0	0
P6	0	0	1	9	3	0	1	2
P7	0	2	0	9	0	0	0	0
P8	5	8	1	29	14	0	2	0

Table 4.15. Aggregated Quotation Summary for Theme 5

Participant	Quotes Relating to Theme 5: Boundaries and Balance
P1	“I only check my email like once a week during the summer, which I refuse to put on my phone. ...when I'm at home for the summer, I check it once a week because I don't want to be thinking about that. I don't want to be worried about that every bit of the summer.”
P3	“I try not to look at my emails on the weekends. So, you know, I'm trying very hard to have all my work and my stuff done Monday through Friday so that I can have my weekends unless it's a music festival weekend. ...I haven't 100% been successful with that yet this year, but I have had more weekends off than I used to in the past.”
P2	“I don't bring work home. I learned a long time ago to not bring work home. Sometimes I'm at work really late, so I don't bring it home. ...between where I live and school is (university) campus. ...I walk the full length of campus from one side... and back. ...That's my, sometimes it's my decompressing, cry time... Almost all of my processing goes in that time.”
P4	“I'm happiest when I have a really, really, healthy work-life balance. For example, this week is great. I can come to work. I love my job to death. But at 4:30, I can turn it off, and I can go home.”
P7	“Whenever I go home, I make sure that everything is done. I will not answer an email unless it is just urgent at home. If I have to do anything band-related, I try to do it in the middle of the day or closer to the evening, so I don't have to worry about it in the morning or before bed. ...Most of the time, I try to do a weekly schedule, and I try to do that at school on Monday, and then the whole week is laid out.”
P1	“I have a therapist. I feel like a lot of teachers at our school do. Not for anything extreme, but I feel like a lot of teachers in today's world, a lot of people in today's world have a therapist. ...It's just a good way to talk things out, especially when you're carrying so much.”
P2	“I've been seeing a therapist once a month, usually for about 20 years. It's only been two different people. It's a good time to just have those tough discussions. Sometimes it's about work, sometimes about life, but it's always helpful. It lets me reset and not carry everything with me.”
P3	“That's when I did start talking with a therapist, which helped, you know, because I got so overwhelmed with so much stuff. I do still talk with a therapist. It was kind of a turning point for me—I realized I needed to put my own oxygen mask on, so to speak.”
P6	“I have a psychiatrist and I have a therapist and I talk to my friends and I talk to my family. ...I see a therapist and it really changed the way I approach things. I'm much better at saying no now, or at least at recognizing when I need to.”
P2	(paraphrased) “Almost all of my processing goes in that time [walk]. ...It's a good time to just have those tough discussions. ...It lets me reset and not carry everything with me... I don't bring work home... It's about building in those routines—whether it's a walk, a regular check-in with a therapist, or just shutting off email—that lets us recharge.”
P4	“But at 4:30, I can turn it off, and I can go home.”
P6	“I have a psychiatrist and I have a therapist and I talk to my friends and I talk to my family.”
P8	“For me, I've come to the acceptance that if it doesn't get done today, it's going to get done tomorrow.”

Research Question 2 - Emotional Montage: The Funding Process, Felt.

The second research question for this study was, “What emotional connections are observed while recalling elements of the funding process?” Through semi-structured interviews with eight instrumental music educators in Title I schools, eight categories were developed, containing a total of 37 codes. The educators experienced emotions from the following parent codes: (1) Positive Achievement, (2) Positive Relational, (3) Eustress, (4) Engaged, (5) Negative Achievement, (6) Negative Relational, (7) Distress, and (8) Disengaged (see Appendix F for the complete codebook and Appendix G for definitions with quote samples).

A series of short, emotional scene snapshots is listed as mini-vignettes to illustrate each emotional category. This offers a rich, narrative-based approach to discussing the code categories in an engaging format. The mini-vignettes provide a sense of depth, movement, life, and texture to show how each emotion exists in the experience and aligns well with the phenomenological approach of this study.

(1) Positive Achievement.

SCENE 1: *The instrumental music educator sits at the office desk, piles of reeds and receipts scattered around. After months of uncertainty, the news finally comes: the school has approved a purchase order for new music stands and chairs. He lets out a long breath, leaning back with a weary smile.*

“Getting that funding was a huge relief” (P1, California).

SCENE 2: *P2 stays late in the quiet band room. The fundraiser was extremely successful and now it is finished. He jots a handwritten thank-you card to a community member for their sponsorship and assistance. He carefully tucks a group photo from their New York trip into the envelope, with pride evident in the way he smooths the corners. Appreciation and satisfaction are visible on his face.*

“There is always a thank you note and it’s always handwritten. It’s on a card and it goes in the old-fashioned mail. Whenever we go on a big trip, we take a nice group photo. Every person who gave us \$25 or more in the past three years got a copy of that photo. Little things go a long way. If it’s a really big gift, we find a better way to do it” (P2, Illinois).

SCENE 3: *In a school with no budget support, P4 stands in front of a group of students after a successful fundraiser. The check from Vertical Raise sits on the music stand, and the feeling of accomplishment is clear as the music educator talks to the students. Pride visible as he discusses what it will mean for the program and what they have achieved together.*

“We will make this last for years; your hard work is worth it,” (P4, Texas).

SCENE 4: *After weeks of booster hustle—bake sales, cookie dough, and donation drives—P5 watches as students prepare for their pre-UIL work. His manner and expression exhibit a combination of pride, relief, and appreciation.*

“My band boosters really help out when they can, like this year they’re paying a thousand dollars for a pre-UIL for both my junior high and my high school bands. Cause if not, my budget couldn’t take it” (P5, Texas).

SCENE 5: *P7 stands at his desk. He opens the case of a clarinet he bought with his own money. He will donate the clarinet to the school inventory and it will give many students the opportunity to participate. He checks it for leaks and loose springs and gives it a good cleaning. After he makes sure everything works, he will pass it to a student who’s never had their own quality instrument. The student will light up, grinning from ear to ear. Imagining that excitement, P7 feels a flood of pride and joy, which reminds him of his purpose..*

“I want them to be able to participate. If they want to join, I will make sure they can. Music is for everyone” (P7, Alabama).

Analytic Commentary. Positive achievement is evident in large wins and important moments, but it is also present in the tiny, day-to-day pieces that are involved in the ebb and flow: the little victories that help support larger goals, the relief in solving a worrisome problem, and the realization of a little piece of the puzzle. The continuous cycle of the funding process relies on these moments for continued motivation to keep working for the mission. For these educators, the goal is achieved through one small success at a time.

(2) Positive Relational.

SCENE 1: *P1 lingers in the hallway after the concert is finished. Other teachers are heading to their cars. A few stop to say congratulations on the student's performance. Several have stopped to reminisce on their own band days from long ago. P1 reflects on how meaningful it is to see colleagues in the audience for his students. Recently, more of the other teachers have been showing up to support the students, and it really feels like they care about what he's doing.*

"They know I care about the program. They've met me. They kind of know who I am and what I do. I feel like a lot of teachers have really started supporting us and want us to do well" (P1, California).

SCENE 2: *Early on the morning of a contest, P5 sees the booster president walk in carrying boxes of breakfast for the band. They both look tired, but they share a small, relieved smile—grateful for each other's help. As students gather around the food, P5 takes in the scene and feels at ease, knowing he doesn't have to do it all alone. He has no problem handing off jobs to the boosters, trusting they'll get things done.*

"My band boosters really help out when they can... I trust them to handle things like fundraising and logistics" (P5, Texas, paraphrased).

SCENE 3: *The school day ends and P7 calls his mom to recap the week. She listens as he talks about challenges and small successes. Their conversations are a steady bit of comfort and encouragement, supporting him for the days ahead.*

“My mom and my dad are my biggest supporters. And my mom and I are best friends. So we talk all the time about everything” (P7, Alabama).

SCENE 4: *It's been a long week of balancing music classes, library duties, and admin work. P3 is excited to join a group of administrators for their regularly scheduled breakfast. They drink coffee, trade stories, share advice, and there's a good amount of laughter combined into the mix. While she sits with the group, P3 is reminded that she doesn't have to handle everything by herself. She feels a sense of fellowship with this group and it leaves her feeling supported and less alone.*

“It is good to talk to other people that are in the same line of business that you are because they're going to understand better than anybody else, even your spouse, unless your spouse is in that line of work as well.” (P3, North Dakota).

Analytic Commentary. These vignettes are filled with gratitude, trust, and empathy. They commonly show steady encouragement from family, reliable support from booster organizations, and the small gestures of colleagues who work together to create a feeling of belonging. The participants emphasized how feeling connected to others in their network helped them build the resilience to tackle the tough moments. Mentorships were frequently mentioned as supportive sources of encouragement. It was not simply the idea of feeling gratitude and admiration for others that helped to provide support. They were also reciprocal in nature. Positive relational connections were also observed when the music educators discussed parents or students who offered appreciation and expressed thanks to the educators. Gratitude was often connected to the sense of mission, helping the educators understand that they had made an impact and assisting with that sense of purpose.

(3) Eustress.

SCENE 1: *This season of fundraising has been challenging. P5 stands in the tower, watching his marching band rehearse under the pink Texas sunset. The band sounds rough right now, but he has seen much progress since last year. He jots down some notes, convinced that with a little more support, his students can achieve even more.*

“I keep telling myself, if we keep building, we’ll get there. The kids are up for it, and so am I.” (P5, Texas, paraphrased).

SCENE 2: *Sitting in the band hall, P6 meets with her band parent organization. This is their second meeting this month and they seem dedicated. They’re working to map out a new fundraising plan. Things have been difficult since the previous plan didn’t work well. As ideas fly, she feels the energy in the room rise. Despite recent setbacks, she ends the meeting with a sense of possibility. She tells her volunteers:*

“If we keep at it, I know we’ll figure it out. I’m hopeful that—if we just get a little more support—good things will come” (P6, California, paraphrased).

SCENE 3: *It’s early morning on a Monday. P7 puts his key into the door lock to unlock the band room and looks up to find a note from a student taped to the door: “I can’t wait for tomorrow’s concert! It’s gonna be so great!” P7 chuckles and carries the note to his desk. He pins it to his bulletin board above his computer and smiles at it. The promise of growing the program and seeing students excited for what’s ahead fills him with a sense of hope.*

“I think in the next couple of years, we will have a good foundation to build that. I also, I want to have a program over a hundred eventually. And we’re on that track,” (P7, Alabama).

SCENE 4: *P3 sits in her office at her desk and looks out the window at the quiet parking lot. She flips through her notebook and jots some ideas down. She is*

feeling a mix of emotions. P3 knows that this school's future is uncertain. They have been notified it might be shutting down at the end of this year. That news was hard as she has invested many years here at this program and it is entirely hers... but she received a call from a neighboring school, and their program is struggling a lot. Even though there is a looming possibility of this school closing, her excitement to brainstorm ways to rebuild that music program fills her with motivation for the possibility of building from the ground up again. She continues to make notes for herself and is excited at the thought of starting over.

“I do think I will stay with them for a few years, just teaching part-time. Because they didn't have a program for a while, we need to build that up again. And I want to get something that's good and solid in place.” (P3, North Dakota).

Analytic Commentary. Across all the educators, hope emerged as a persistent force—even when frustrations were high, the participants found ways to reframe the situation. One of the educators expressed disappointment and frustrations with their current school, but also shared their excitement for the upcoming school year where they would have a better working situation and were looking forward to building there. That situation arose again with another participant as a school closure was discussed. The educator mentioned a sense of excitement at the thought of starting over at a neighboring school. P3 mentioned the exhaustion of starting again and how the tiniest details had been taken for granted in the program she had already built, but it was empowering to watch her talk about leaving the second school in a better place for an incoming teacher. P3 planned to spend time to transform another program in the hopes of leaving it better than she found it. These victories are rooted in student enthusiasm and the ongoing belief that things can and will improve. The idea of hopeful improvements stemming from work and good will was evident in all situations. These moments of hopefulness sustain educators through

uncertainty and challenge. Even in the face of setbacks, the desire to build, refine, and grow remains a constant to guide to their work and vision for the future.

(4) Engaged.

SCENE 1: *It has been a long and exhausting week. P7 crosses the parking lot feeling a little defeated. He gets in his car to head home but decides to take a quiet moment to pray first. He closes his eyes and hears the quiet around him. He reflects on the difficulties and all the little victories. He reminds himself that his work is a calling. He feels a sense of calm and knows that his faith gives him the strength to face another day and care for his students.”*

“I just rely on the Lord, really... any negative feeling that I have, I take it to God and I say, here it is, Lord, you can have it because I'm not going to let a negative emotion get in the way of what God has called me to do.”

(P7, Alabama).

SCENE 2: *P4 stands in the band hall and looks around. It was a tough rehearsal, and he feels the stress of another year with limited funding. He locks up the classroom, and he pauses to remind himself that he simply can't do it all—Rome wasn't built in a day—and that's okay. He's learned that it's ok to ask for help. Delegating and recognizing when he needs to step back and be patient is important. It allows him to keep supporting his students in the long term without getting frustrated. He is aware that he can't flip the program overnight and that self-awareness helps him feel calm about the progress that is being made.*

“I'm happiest when I have a really, really healthy work-life balance. For example, this week is great. I can come to work. I love my job to death.

But at 4:30, I can turn it off, and I can go home.” (P4, Texas).

SCENE 3: *P2 has been navigating shifting administrative expectations for years. New superintendents, new initiatives, new processes. He has developed a steady rhythm over time that has allowed him to adapt and co-exist. Whenever setbacks arise—a denied purchase order, a sudden schedule change—he takes a walk to*

clear his head, and then returns to his office. His resilience over the years and his determination to find another solution have always found a way. The longevity of his career is a testament to his ability to adapt and bounce back.

“So I stop, park my car, and I, every day, rain, shine, snow, sleet, break or not, I walk the full length of campus and back. It's a little over two miles. I don't care what the weather is. That's my, sometimes it's my decompressing, cry time. Even if it's raining... Almost all my processing goes into that time. I'll take my phone. I'll do voice memos during it if I have to.” (P2, Illinois).

SCENE 4: *P8 sits in on a school budget meeting. He listens as someone suggests cutting back on music funding to save money and supplement other items that aren't related to instruction. He feels a wave of protectiveness for his students and his program. He has parents and students that will advocate too, but it is his program. He sends a detailed email to the administration to defend the value of music for every child, and emphasizes the need to focus on student learning and what is best for the students.*

“If it's not making learning better, we shouldn't be doing it... This is what we need for kids. This is what's best for kids.” (P5, Texas).

SCENE 5: *The grant application is long and the odds are uncertain, but P6 sits at her kitchen table night after night, filling in forms and gathering paperwork. She's been denied before, but she keeps at it, believing her students deserve better.*

“We kept applying for grants until one came through” (P6, California).

Analytic Commentary. The adaptations emerged as educators chose to meet the challenges with perseverance and determination. These vignettes reveal hardships and actions driven by underlying emotions. These emotions inspired the educators to rise to challenges and fight for their goals and mission. They represented a conscious choice to combat offering a passive response.

Resourcefulness in providing instruments, funding, reeds, and food was prevalent across all narratives. Several teachers scoured pawn shops and online listings, and tirelessly searched for grants and resources. The educators invented creative solutions to make the most of what their program could obtain, advocating fiercely, even when facing resistance.

The sacrifice code showed repeated use of donated time, efforts, skills, and finances. The educators routinely spent their own funds to ensure students were not turned away from participating. Faith provided a valuable resource for several of the participants. Relying on their mission as a calling and offering their suffering and talents to a higher power brought them peace and calm. This understanding offered a sense of purpose and direction when faced with obstacles and restrictions that become overwhelming.

The *engaged* category shows adaptive responses for a culture of action. Improvisation, trial and error, and determination combine to find a way and make the puzzle work. Each educator adjusted, resisted, and reworked problems in demonstrating their commitment to the mission and their engagement in problem-solving.

(5) Negative Achievement.

SCENE 1: *It's late and P1 is still up. He looks at the clock on the wall. Too late to be working, that's for sure, he thinks, shaking his head. He looks at his wish list again. The wish lists are due tomorrow, and he has put so much time into researching instrument models, brands, prices, and music. He is hoping to start a marching band next year, but the marching music is so expensive. He lets out a sigh. \$1500 for a show? He can include it on the wish list, but it is so expensive that he runs the risk of getting only that. If that is the case... is he definitely interested in committing to starting the marching band? He considers leaving it off so that the other items get approved... but then he will never have what he needs to start the marching band. He considers... All this effort he has put in and*

it could end up like the few years where nothing was approved from his wish list. His shoulders slump in frustration.

“I put in a wish list. I submit it. And maybe I hear back that we’re going to buy a viola and six pieces of sheet music. Maybe I hear we’re going to buy ten pieces of music. Maybe they are buying the marching music. Maybe they are not buying any of it. I push in a wish list for the first two years and I got no response at all.” (P1, California, paraphrased).

SCENE 2: *It’s been a long afternoon at school. P5 stands in the main office. He taps his foot impatiently as he waits. The business manager is still processing a simple purchase order request for reeds that need to be purchased today if they are going to get here in time for festival. The paperwork has already bounced between several desks. Glancing at the clock, frustration builds. He leans against the wall hoping that if his physical presence is seen, it will be a reminder that he is on a time crunch and they need to process his paperwork.*

“I’m impatient with all the red tape” (P5, Texas).

SCENE 3: *P4 scrolls through the district’s email on the latest professional development offerings. He sighs and runs his hand through his hair. Most of these sessions are presented by companies and promotion-sponsored vendors. It’s consultants who have never taught before. Their offerings and advice feel hollow and disconnected from the realities of what is needed most. With as much as we spend on professional development here, you’d think we could get something useful.*

“Most of the time, I would say 90% or more. It’s someone who’s never worked in education that has some kind of thing to sell. And they come present to us and claim to have the answers we need. And we just tune out” (P4, Texas).

SCENE 4: *P3 waits for an answer on her request for funds. She keeps following up, asking politely, and checking in with the superintendent. This always feels a little micromanaged to her. Instead of receiving a budget, he has her submit each*

request directly to him. She feels frustrated because she never knows what amount is available. Should she have asked for more? Less? Worded the request differently? This would all be so much easier if she had an allotment from the budget. She could plan better. This process is frustrating to her.

“It was like this when I came. I thought it was very odd, but there was no budget set for the program or for almost anything. And so what it was, was the superintendent would be like, well, you just make a request and requisition it to me and I’ll decide whether it’s good or not. And I was like, well. I would really feel better with an amount so that I would know the budget” (P3, North Dakota).

Analytic Commentary. The grinding mental toll of frustration and disappointment was evident throughout every single interview. The frustration of minimal autonomy, impatience with the requirements, unresponsive individuals throughout the funding process, and minimally rewarded efforts were situations shared by all. The time invested in filling out grant after grant weighed heavily as each educator discussed the paperwork and the waiting. Several educators were successfully obtaining funding from those efforts, but many of those stories ended with denials. The educators spoke of taking those feelings, processing them, and then deciding whether to apply for more grants or use their time in other ways. The grant process was rampant with disappointment and bitterness. Ignored wish lists elicited similar responses. Educators discussed spending hours researching, preparing, and submitting requests, only to find themselves wondering whether they should have asked for more or less. What would the magic number be for approval? A few educators realized there was no magic number. There would be no approval. This was met by disappointment and disillusionment. Inconsistent rules were often problematic and led to feelings of disappointment and frustration, especially when other branches of the arts were consistently funded without explanation for the inequality.

A few educators mentioned feeling undermined in their professional experience because they had to have every single request verified and approved individually by the administration. The perception of this fact left them feeling powerless. Several educators questioned whether their sacrifices were worth the effort. These emotions showed up in their responses and were mostly related to a specific incident, but sometimes they traced their disappointment to prior experiences. These discussions were like peeling an onion, layer by layer. There were deeper layers of past setbacks, which intensified feelings. As the discussion continued with some of these educators, it became clear that these strong emotions were rarely about a single event but rather the accumulation of many similar moments over time.

(6) Negative Relational.

SCENE 1: *P7 looks at his spring roster. Second semester starts tomorrow and he has 6 more students than what he planned for. The three trumpets he bought last year are already being used. Same for the clarinets. He did purchase an extra snare drum out of his own paycheck. That could work... but he already has 5 percussionists. That would be more percussionists than what he would normally want... but he didn't see any new instruments at the pawn shop to grab, nothing worth buying anyways. He thinks to himself, "I'm going to have to use that extra drum, even though it's too many percussionists. Extra practice pads will help. Yeah, that will work. Not terrible; at least they get to be involved.*

“There is no barrier for entry. It doesn't matter where you come from, what your family is, or how much money you have, we will figure out a way for you to participate” (P7, Alabama).

SCENE 2: *It was a super tense staff meeting. There is no budget for the high school. Like none. No one to even submit it; we are without an administrator. They asked if I would work on one. There is one other teacher who has experience with budgets and spending. I said I would only do it if we worked as a team. I guess I will google for budget examples and see what pops up for other high schools. If we copy different parts of them that work for us, we should be able to*

figure it out. I just don't know why this is my issue. Why am I doing this? I feel abandoned."

"One year, I was actually on the committee to form the entire school's budget. So, making the SIPSA goals, making all of the different categories. Yeah, so I actually did form the entire budget. It's because our principal was fired and they didn't really put anyone in place to do this, and there was a vacuum, and then we were going to go into the next year with no budget and wouldn't be able to spend any money. So the librarian and I just were like, okay, we have no training in budget creation, but we kind of just had to do it. So, I've actually created an entire public high school's budget that was ratified and used for an entire school year" (P6, California).

SCENE 3: *It's lunch time. P3 finds herself alone in her office again. Usually, it is a good thing because it keeps the school gossip to a minimum and she can focus on the important stuff without everyone's drama. She looks out the window at the playground. The other teachers are supervising recess together, laughing in a small group. She can count on one hand the number of times she has seen another music teacher this year, mostly at conferences or special events.*

"I work in a rural district and rarely see colleagues" (P3, North Dakota).

SCENE 4: *With her head in her hands, P6 considers whether to mention burnout around her friends. She worries about how her honesty will be received. It's risky to talk openly about struggling, but she can't keep pretending everything is fine.*

"Talking about my burnout feels risky, but it is real." (P6, California).

SCENE 5: *P5 glances at the faculty calendar. Here is another week where there is no mention of any of the music events or acknowledgements. The students will wonder why they are recognized on the morning announcements again. Last time they noticed they were left off and I was able to calm them down. They were fixated on the school not caring about their performance. He starts to write an*

update to be read over the PA with morning announcements, but stops. The sense of being overlooked and left out washes over him. He feels it too. They are unrecognized. He wonders if anyone else in the building understands what it takes to keep the program going. After reflecting for a moment, he wonders whether it is worth even sending the principal the update at all.

“There was a while there they wouldn't announce any of the band accomplishments over the intercom until I forced my hand — I'm like I shouldn't have to send you an email to tell them, hey we won this pre-UIL for marching—hey we did this; but yet y'all can announce this, this, and this for this other person. So that was a struggle. And that's something because my kids are like, man, we always get shafted and we're the one program that's winning. And I'm like, guys, be humble. And, you know, that's something I had to fight for, because believe it or not, the kids do notice when you don't mention their stuff, their accomplishments. And it really does hurt and it really does discourage them, especially it's like my kids said, what else do we have to do to get recognized?” (P5, Texas)

Analytic Commentary. Several of the educators mentioned being the only music teacher in their district. Loneliness and a sense of disconnection were common. Rarely seeing teachers who taught in the same discipline created unique challenges. Feelings of abandonment were present from the administration or other colleagues. Disillusionment sneaked in and grew with repeated exposure to the same issues. Concerns about professional development offerings were shared by most participants. The educators mentioned being constantly offered irrelevant training on entry-level topics as a blanket fix for professional development. It was noted that even mentioning personal struggles and needing help was unwelcome among their peer or mentor group.

These experiences are not passing emotions but emotions that accumulated over time. These instances began to shape each educator's sense of belonging and professional identity.

Lacking recognition, understanding, and authentic support left educators questioning their value and created a divide between them and their peers.

(7) Distress.

SCENE 1: *P1 is hunched over his desk. It's concert week, and he is busy replying to emails from parents, budgeting for the reeds for next semester, and fixing last-minute instrument issues. Each new message seems to bring about three more problems to solve. He rubs his jaw. The familiar ache is back as his TMJ starts to flare up again. He whispers to himself that he is almost to winter break. Don't give up and I'll be fine, he thinks.*

"It's concert week, you know the concert week is stressful for anyone, whether it's a title one school or they're in a very well-funded school, but just the funding process in general — worrying about it outside of school it's just — I feel like the more I do at the school, the more I have to do" (P1, California).

SCENE 2: *This week has been a lot, thinks P3. Managing the library, teaching music classes, handling administrative tasks... she slumps into her chair. She can hear the hum of the lights. If she closes her eyes for a moment, she thinks she could fall asleep right here.*

"I was working seven days a week and it got to be too much" (P3, North Dakota).

SCENE 3: *Tomorrow begins the primary fundraiser. That money will need to last several years. P4 lies in bed and stares at the ceiling. He runs through a mental checklist of everything that needs to be completed—and considers all the things that could go wrong. Low turnout, missing supplies, unexpected expenses... He can feel the anxiety. It's sharp and persistent. He feels like sleep will be nearly impossible tonight.*

“It's hard not to think about what could happen for us and my program if we don't have that funding. So yeah, I get frustrated by it, but I also try not to let it affect how I approach the funding process” (P4, Texas).

SCENE 4: *It's long after most staff have left. P8 sits alone in the band room with a to-do list that never seems to shrink. He knows when he walks to his car, it will be the only one in the parking lot. There is just so much to do. The weight of upcoming performances, trips, and endless scheduling conflicts always looms. As he flips through emails about transportation and funding, he feels the exhaustion settle in, and he sighs deeply.*

“There are days... no there are weeks that it's—even today, we had a testing day, so I had time to get caught up on our Disney trip we're doing next month, and it's, 'Oh my gosh, this is overwhelming, I have to do all these things in the next month,' but it's planning it out, writing things down, making lists. ... For me, I've come to the acceptance that if it doesn't get done today, it's going to get done tomorrow.” (P8, Illinois).

Analytic Commentary. The distress category encompasses stress, feeling overwhelmed, exhaustion, and anxiety. Every participant discussed feelings of stress and exhaustion. The pressure to *figure it out* and the isolation created by the overwhelming need to accomplish the mission were embedded in the entire framework of their jobs. It surfaced during concert week, festivals, and late evenings devoted to working, planning, and fulfilling obligations. The educators discussed struggling to keep up with the to-do lists and having exhaustion as a regular companion. It was mentioned that they were expected to wear multiple hats and do all the jobs while keeping up the main job they were hired for: music instruction. Several of the teachers were exasperated by the expectation to handle all the roles with little support. Anxiety and burnout hover in the background, never going away. There were acknowledgements of peers with greater resources, other states with better education policies, and other districts with easier processes.

These emotions show a deeper vulnerability in the profession. The idea of chronic overwork was mentioned often. A few of the educators had other obligations, such as performing as a musician in a semi-professional group or a union representative for their district. There were times when discussions wavered on the feeling of being one emergency away from crisis or breakdown. These recurring emotions are dangerous because they accumulate, taking a toll on well-being and sustainability. When asked directly if their process was sustainable, few participants responded positively. The narratives showed that this stress management process is not entirely a personal task... It is a structural challenge.

(8) Disengaged.

SCENE 1: *During a department meeting, P2 reviews the routine for submitting purchase orders. He has done this so many times that he could do it in his sleep. He recites the steps for the group of teachers he is working with. His voice is steady and detached. This is all just routine.*

“Everyone fills out purchase order requests to start in February. Those are then brought back to us in April for discussion and finalization” (P2, Illinois).

SCENE 2: *P1 stands in the hallway between classes. He goes over the VAPA credits for the new choir teacher. His voice is level, almost rehearsed. He is just sharing factual information that she could look up online, he thinks to himself... but it will be much easier to understand if he walks her through it.*

“... And then the beginning classes, which are every student in California has to take two of what they call VAPA credits (Visual and Performing Arts credits). And each credit is one semester. So they basically have to do a year of that program, whether that's band, orchestra, visual art, choir. And we used to have computer graphics design. And in California, what that looks like is we have something called the Williams Act, which means that students are not required to purchase any school supplies. If we ask them to get a supply, we have to provide

it, meaning in these band and orchestra classes, we have a lot, lot, lot of school instruments” (P1, California).

SCENE 3: *P6 is on a Zoom call with other educators in her district. She answers questions about her program’s class sizes and budget allocations with the same neutral cadence she’s used dozens of times before. Her tone is measured and matter of fact.*

“We have a club account, which is what California does for a lot of programs.

Any club at the school—we have to call it the music club just to kind of have that account” (P6, California).

SCENE 4: *P5 sits at his desk working during his prep time. He is inputting numbers one by one into a spreadsheet document. The keys click as he works. He reviews the totals and expenses. Everything lines up and nothing is displaced. He does this task almost mechanically. He saves the file, leans back, and looks out at the classroom. Another thing completed and no longer on his plate. He does not feel pleased or upset... just checking things off the to-do list for the day.*

“I just do what needs to be done” (P5, Texas).

Analytic Commentary. *Neutrality* and detachment were observed often. Mostly in times where the educators were offering fact-based information, for example: I have 350 students in my school. All of the educators were able to offer their school information and the demographic make-up of their communities with a disengaged tone. Other moments when disengagement was present were discussions of job roles, positions, or routine areas of the funding process. The participants shifted into modes of mechanical efficiency when discussing areas that were procedural or basic information sharing. During these moments, emotion was replaced by practiced habits.

It was easy to wonder if the neutrality that was experienced offered a buffer for years of work and study of the funding process. The educators who were more experienced were able to

provide a great deal of information in a neutral way. The lack of emotion exhibited during parts of their interviews was interesting as those practices had become highly polished and were easily understood. Inquiries about the earlier parts of their careers, while they were learning the ropes, led to emotional responses and stories that were similar to those of the participants who were less experienced. After discussing these topics with all of the participants, it was considered that some of these moments of detachment may not be the absence of feeling, but rather a way to compartmentalize as the process was learned and the individual moved on to cope with new areas.

Interconnection of RQ1 & RQ2

Overall Intersections of Primary Themes & Emotional Codes. The primary themes were organized in a comprehensive table to chart the frequency of emotional code category totals for each theme. Table 4.16 shows the frequency totals for emotional code use by primary theme, while Table 4.17 offers the individual totals for each participant. The emotional codes were frequency-counted as they appeared in the narrative responses along with each theme. If the participant changed their thought or topic, a new emotion could emerge as a separate presence for that theme.

Mission and Impact. Engagement and negative achievement were the dominant emotions. The participants were highly invested in their mission, but discussed encountering frequent obstacles. This led the participants to describe frustrations and moments of concern or disappointment. *Positive achievement* and *positive relational* codes were present, but appeared with less frequency. While their successes and supportive relationships were discussed, the challenges the music educators experienced were more prevalent. There were minimal moments

of *distress* and *disengaged* throughout this theme overall. For the majority of the time, the educators described being invested during the challenges and searching for solutions.

Roles, Relationships, & Support. *Positive relational* and *engagement* codes were very high for this theme. The music educators discussed supportive relationships and active collaboration efforts in their responses. This included reaching out to mentors, working with other colleagues in the building, or using family and friends as supports. *Negative achievement* and *negative relational* showed high usage. There were frustrations and disappointments mentioned from some participants as they felt certain relationships caused stress. This sometimes led to infrequent moments of *distress*.

Navigating Systems & Strategies. Almost all of the participants expressed frequent frustrations with changing systems or dysfunctional processes. Those participants who felt the process was transparent and fair showed high levels of *engagement*, *positive achievement*, and *positive relational* codes. Those educators who discussed low levels of transparency, disappointment in the process, or no process for funding showed higher levels of *negative achievement* codes, such as *frustration*, *concern*, *impatience*, and *disappointment*. The *disengagement* category was higher for this theme. The educators often exhibited emotional exhaustion or neutrality in areas of the conversation involving discussing bureaucratic issues that were beyond their control.

Professional Growth & Development. The participants mostly discussed concern and frustration with their professional development (PD) options or opportunities. Several mentioned that the PD options had little to no relevance to their daily use. Others mentioned how their district PD opportunities were mostly driven by sales initiatives or district promotional pushes that had little to no ties to teaching. One educator noted that their district was focusing all PD on

lesson planning, which was confusing and frustrating for them. The educator felt almost insulted at the idea of the entire district of teachers not understanding how to properly create a lesson plan. The *engagement* and *positive achievement/relational* codes were much less frequent for this theme, showing very limited teacher satisfaction with PD offerings.

Boundaries & Balance. Each of the music educators was making efforts to find balance with their work and professional lives. Because of this, the *engagement* code was extremely high. The educators were each proactive in working to set boundaries and maintain balance. *Eustress* and *positive achievement/relational* codes were present as the participants expressed feelings of empowerment and hopefulness as they felt the positive impacts of their efforts. Most of the educators felt they were being successful with the strategies that they had been utilizing, which led to lower levels of *distress* and *disengaged*. P6 specifically expressed concerns over a lack of boundaries and balance strategies, stating a need for information on systems to put into place.

Table 4.16 provides an overall frequency table of the code categories within the primary themes.

Table 4.16. Overall Frequency of Emotional Code Usage within Primary Themes

All Participants	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
Mission & Impact	61	43	11	110	98	7	7	17
Roles, Relationships, & Support	112	174	19	215	192	36	19	29
Navigating Systems & Strategies	126	159	21	278	299	33	19	72
Professional Growth & Development	22	10	6	42	118	19	4	7
Boundaries & Balance	19	20	10	104	60	9	7	4

Primary Themes & Emotional Codes by Participant. Each participant operated within their own school, district, funding system, state policy, etc. Because of this, each breakdown is

diverse and based on that individual's unique experience. Table 4.17 provides the individual breakdowns of the codes by participant.

Patterns at the Participant Level. A few patterns emerged when the participants are viewed individually. Several of the participants had much higher frequencies of code usage. This was reflected by the depth of the interview responses and the emotional complexity of the experiences offered, which contained more details within the narrative. The roles filled by the educators, the years of experience, and the situations within the funding experience all contributed to frequency of code usage. The participants with lower frequencies often had less teaching experience or fewer moments of emotional expressiveness as they were at an earlier stage in their career.

Individual Code Frequencies. There were large differences in the positivity contrast between many of the different participants. For example, notice the difference between P2 and some of the other music educators, as P2 consistently reported higher positive codes across all primary themes. P2 was heavily invested in *roles, relationships, & support* and *navigating systems & strategies*, while P1 showed higher frequencies in *mission & impact*.

P6 had a higher frequency of *negative achievement* code usage that aligned with the experience of having poor district leadership. P6 discussed being required to put together the annual high school budget without assistance, as there was no one else to put it together. There were also frustrations and discussions of attaining litigative support to combat illegal district actions with funding and supplemental pay. P6's concerns over a lack of boundaries and balance strategies were reflected in the lower frequencies for *boundaries & balance* and the higher frequencies listed for the negative categories.

Eustress was rare overall, but was most likely to show up in participant narrative moments discussing their *mission* or *relational* themes. *Disengagement* often appeared in the *navigating systems & strategies* themes. All participants reported low positive codes and higher negative codes in the *professional growth & development* theme area. Proactive self-care was important for all participants. This was evident in the *boundaries & balance* theme with moderate level *engagement* frequencies and lower *distress/disengagement* numbers. *Negative engagement* was most frequent in *navigating systems* and *professional growth & development*, whereas *positive relational* and *engaged* codes were highest in *roles, relationships, & support*.

Table 4.17. Breakdown & Frequency of Emotional Code Usage within Primary Themes

Participant 1	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
Mission & Impact	5	4	5	22	12	0	0	4
Roles, Relationships, & Support	5	8	3	14	8	3	0	1
Navigating Systems & Strategies	5	0	4	12	27	1	2	15
Professional Growth & Development	2	0	3	1	21	3	0	2
Boundaries & Balance	2	1	0	6	1	0	0	0

Participant 2	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
Mission & Impact	20	17	2	23	15	0	1	5
Roles, Relationships, & Support	38	50	3	42	30	7	8	5
Navigating Systems & Strategies	43	28	2	50	28	3	3	21
Professional Growth & Development	10	7	0	12	10	3	1	2
Boundaries & Balance	5	3	0	14	2	3	2	1

Participant 3	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
Mission & Impact	14	7	1	20	8	2	1	6
Roles, Relationships, & Support	35	48	5	50	30	6	7	8
Navigating Systems & Strategies	18	13	2	50	27	10	4	12
Professional Growth & Development	0	0	1	4	6	3	2	1
Boundaries & Balance	0	0	5	9	0	1	1	0

Participant 4	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
Mission & Impact	7	9	0	12	9	0	4	2
Roles, Relationships, & Support	8	25	1	19	13	7	2	6
Navigating Systems & Strategies	4	16	2	16	23	3	2	3
Professional Growth & Development	1	1	1	2	14	4	1	1
Boundaries & Balance	6	4	3	13	5	1	1	1

Participant 5	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
Mission & Impact	6	1	0	11	13	0	0	0
Roles, Relationships, & Support	10	13	0	26	29	0	0	2
Navigating Systems & Strategies	14	76	0	37	32	1	0	8
Professional Growth & Development	1	1	0	4	2	0	0	0
Boundaries & Balance	1	2	0	15	7	0	0	0

Participant 6	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
Mission & Impact	1	3	3	9	19	2	0	0
Roles, Relationships, & Support	5	5	1	15	32	1	1	4
Navigating Systems & Strategies	8	6	4	24	72	6	5	4
Professional Growth & Development	2	0	1	5	36	2	0	1
Boundaries & Balance	0	0	1	9	3	0	1	2

Participant 7	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
Mission & Impact	0	0	0	5	2	0	0	0
Roles, Relationships, & Support	1	4	1	7	4	1	0	2
Navigating Systems & Strategies	4	6	3	22	5	1	0	5
Professional Growth & Development	0	0	0	5	1	0	0	0
Boundaries & Balance	0	2	0	9	28	4	0	0

Participant 8	Positive Achievement	Positive Relational	Eustress	Engaged	Negative Achievement	Negative Relational	Distress	Disengaged
Mission & Impact	8	2	0	8	20	3	1	0
Roles, Relationships, & Support	10	21	5	42	46	11	1	1
Navigating Systems & Strategies	30	14	4	67	85	8	3	4
Professional Growth & Development	6	1	0	9	28	4	0	0
Boundaries & Balance	5	8	1	29	14	0	2	0

RQ3: Coping Strategies Discussed by Participants

The research participants employed a variety of coping strategies to manage the challenges of the funding process. Strategies were classified into six categories based on the similarity of the mechanism. The coping strategies were divided into the following categories: (1) seeking additional funding, (2) strategic planning, (3) acceptance, (4) seeking support, (5) mental and well-being, and (6) maladaptive/negative. Table 4.18 presents the strategies used by the participants, along with their categories and descriptions. This table illustrates the different categories and definitions used to engage with the challenges and to seek solutions. Together, these insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the methods participants used.

Table 4.18. Categories of Coping Mechanisms with Descriptions and Examples for RQ3

Coping Category	Description	Strategy Examples
1: Seeking Additional Funding	Obtaining financial resources from outside sources to support educational programs or initiatives.	Grants, donations, sponsorships, partnerships, fundraising initiatives or projects
2: Strategic Planning	Process of aligning and allocating financial, human, and material resources effectively to meet goals.	1, 3, 5-year plans, making wishlists, delegation of responsibilities, establishing a crisis plan for resources
3: Acceptance	Accepting constraints and/or finding alternative ways to find purpose/regulation.	Faith-spirituality, focusing on student success/growth, reframing to find the silver lining, utilizing a growth mindset
4: Seeking Support	Actively engaging with experienced individuals who provide guidance, advice, and feedback.	Seeking help or advice from mentors, building and/or relying on booster groups, seeking out support from family or friends, building relationships with school personnel
5: Mental and Well-Being	Utilizing practices aimed at promoting mental and emotional well-being.	Therapy, counseling, self-reflection, voice memos, journaling, routines, check-ins, mental health days, boundary setting, rest, self-love and self-care
6: Maladaptive/Negative	Ineffective or harmful behaviors and thought patterns that are used to manage stress or unpleasant emotions.	Overworking, working seven days a week, internalizing stress, not seeking help, taking on too many responsibilities, unable to delegate, emotional suppression, putting on ‘a happy face’

Reliability, Validity, and Triangulation

The open-ended interview questions were the same for all participants, creating a consistent, structured baseline for each participant (Mathers et al., 2000). Diverse perspectives were sought, as instrumental music teachers from different districts and locations were invited to participate (Carter et al., 2014). Clarifying questions were asked during each interview to fully understand the participants’ context and perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Reliability was also maintained through the inductive coding process, which ensured the originality of the

codes from within each participant's transcripts (Vears, 2022). Each transcript was coded after the interview, in the order of participation. Information was compiled from each transcript to begin creating categories and themes to strengthen the study's credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Member checking was used to confirm the correct understanding and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2000). The instrumental music educators were emailed their coded transcripts, along with a window and a deadline for corrections or alterations for interpretation. P2 and P3 requested alterations for their coded transcripts. Participants who did not respond with the requested edits were left as complete.

To ensure validity, it was essential to clearly demonstrate the alignment and connection to the research questions, the methods, and the outcomes analyzed (Mathers et al., 2000). Tables were used to make the data and interpretation transparent and clear to the reader throughout the analysis and the findings chapter, thereby fostering trust (Cloutier, 2020). I also maintained a reflexive journal to document potential bias and reflections relating to the credibility of the perspectives (Ortlipp, 2008).

Triangulation efforts were achieved through member checking (Creswell, 2000) and by targeting specific questions across the diverse participant demographics (Carter et al., 2014). The questions in Table 4.19 approached key concepts from multiple perspectives and allowed cross-checking of participants' experiences and beliefs, thereby strengthening the study's validity. These processes worked together to ensure the study's trustworthiness (Creswell & Cresswell, 2023).

Table 4.19. Targeted Questions for Points of Triangulation

Area of Focus	Question for Triangulation
Funding Process & Impact	• What is your understanding of how funding for your program is determined? • Can you describe how your program fits within your district's allocation process? • Can you talk a little about your district's funding sources? • Can you share how you believe your school's funding structure impacts your program and students? • Are there examples of how financial constraints affected student participation or a learning outcome?
Support Systems and Relationships	• Do you have any support systems or strategies you have put in place? • Who do you talk with for support or advice? • Are there supports you wish were available within the school system? • How do you associate the role of advocacy to the funding process?
Professional Development, Training, and Preparation	• Were there any parts of your music education degree training that you feel helped prepare you to navigate program funding? • Have you seen or explored any professional development that relates to work-life stress or emotional management?
Transparency	• What is your perception of the transparency within your school's funding process?
Coping/Boundaries	• How would you describe your feelings about the funding process? • Are there ways you manage some of those emotional aspects with the funding process? • Have you found strategies that help you process stress from work or school? • Are there specific goals or boundaries you've put in place as you've gone through this process?

Summary of Findings

This qualitative descriptive study explored how instrumental music educators in Title I schools describe their experiences with the funding process, the emotional connections observed during its recall, and the strategies used to navigate it. The findings revealed five primary themes that relate to RQ1: (1) Mission & Impact, (2) Roles, Relationships, & Support, (3) Navigating Systems & Strategies, (4) Professional Development & Growth, and (5) Boundaries & Balance. These themes were developed from 25 codes derived from participants' responses to the interview questions. The narratives were separately coded for emotional observations and emotional tone associations, yielding 37 emotional codes and 8 parent code categories. The parent codes that relate to RQ2 were (1) Positive Achievement, (2) Positive Relational, (3)

Eustress, (4) Engaged, (5) Negative Achievement, (6) Negative Relational, (7) Distress, and (8) Disengaged. The primary themes were cross-referenced with each participant's emotional associations, providing a view of the emotional connections to the funding process.

The participants demonstrated a wide range of emotional experiences. Engagement and active involvement were evident across all primary themes. Supportive relationships and collaborative moments were sources of positivity, while challenges and frustrations were most often discussed in relation to funding systems, professional development, and training. The *negative achievement* code was most commonly found in the *system navigation & growth* theme, while *positive relational* and *engagement* codes were highest in the *roles, relationships, & support* theme.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions & Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the lived experiences of instrumental music educators from Title I schools and the meanings derived from the primary themes and associated emotions. Three research questions guided this study: (1) How do instrumental music educators in Title I schools describe their experiences with the funding process? (2) What emotional connections are observed while recalling elements of the funding process, and (3) what are the strategies being employed to navigate the funding process? Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to collect data. The data were then coded for emotional associations and thematic patterns. Through the exploration of this data, connections were made to yield insights into the funding process from diverse perspectives.

Conclusions

This study reinforced findings from the existing literature on the emotional toll faced by educators in Title I schools. The experiences of funding navigation in this study reflect the same pressures that Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2011) and Thompson (2017) describe: stress in securing funding and in providing high-quality instruction with limited resources.

The focus on the educators' personal stories and the emotional associations observed reflects the emotional connections discussed by Randall (2019). An educator's emotional well-being is closely linked to job satisfaction, negative achievement, distress, their employed coping strategies, and disengagement. The emotional stressors hinder positive achievement levels, relational levels, and instructional effectiveness, especially when teachers experience isolation, detachment, and exhaustion. This exploration also aligns with Ingersoll (2002) regarding teacher turnover due to support shortages and personal burden. As discussed by Greenberg et al. (2016)

and Gallup (2013), this work contributes to the understanding of how stress can lead to high turnover and mental health issues.

Deeply Committed to the Mission. The high *engagement* levels demonstrate that these instrumental music educators are deeply committed to their mission and their programs, despite the obstacles they face. Most of the educators were invested entirely in their work, which is shown by the low *disengagement* counts. Even when frustrated and unsupported, the educators adapted and found ways to make it work. The data showed that even with the frustrations of the funding system navigation, the educators continued their effort and involvement. Frustrations and obstacles were high. Emotional burdens and occasional detachment resulted from prolonged efforts containing higher levels of disappointments and frustrations.

Relationships are Key. Triangulation solidified the centrality of supportive relationships and their importance in the educators' experiences. Positive relational codes suggest that supportive relationships are important but are not universally experienced. There was variation between participants in areas of context, years of experience, and school environment, which influenced how each educator's support system developed.

The Process is Rewarding & Challenging. The presence of positive and negative codes reflects a reality that is both rewarding and challenging. Eustress's occasional coding appearances show that hope and positive motivation are possible, but they must balance with the negative achievement moments, which can be quite stressful. Even though the *positive achievement* moments were less prevalent in some themes, they were still crucial and meaningful when present.

Professional Development (PD) Needs an Overhaul. The predominance of negative codes emphasizes the lack of meaningful opportunities in PD for instrumental music educators in

Title I schools. The absence of positive codes suggests that growth is possible, but it is not the norm. Better-designed, focused, and meaningful PD is important to the *positive achievement, engagement, positive relational, and eustress categories*. The disparity in the numerical code ranges shows that access is uneven and even out of context for what educators need for their own growth. Several participants described “one size fits all” PD, often tailored to beginning teachers or unconnected to the educational environment.

The Necessity of Training for Self-Care. The high *engagement* frequencies indicate that educators are not passive about balance and boundary strategies. They are actively taking steps to protect their well-being. The lower amounts of negative codes that appeared in the *boundaries & balance* theme indicate that challenges exist, but they are not dominating the discussion. It is evident from this data that boundaries can be motivating and uplifting. Excitement and empowerment were present for those putting systems into place. Each participant found strength through different modes of coping, which highlights the need to train on different approaches and options for stress management.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Support structures matter. Transparency and a clear format for completing procedures are crucial. Collaborative relationships, teamwork, and administrative support are vital as educators work to be resilient and navigate funding for their programs. Intuitive processes and expectations relieve frustrations and offer a step-by-step approach to goal attainment. Mentorships and timely check-ins with veteran teachers put relationships in place to provide guidance and support. Table 5.1 highlights specific suggestions for policy and practice along with explanations and supported findings.

Table 5.1. Implications for Practice and Policy

Implications for Policy and Practice	Explanation & Context	Evidence	Recommendations
Support structures matter	Strong relationships with colleagues, administration, and community are vital for educator resilience.	High <i>positive relational</i> and <i>engaged</i> codes in <i>roles, relationships, & support</i> for most participants.	• Establish formal peer observation/coaching programs • Facilitate cross-district or regional networking events • Provide time within the school day for collegial planning and support
System navigation is challenging	Navigating bureaucracy, funding processes, and district policies is a frequent source of frustration and emotional withdrawal. Transparency and targeted administrative support are needed.	<i>Negative achievement</i> and <i>disengaged</i> codes are at their highest in <i>navigating systems & strategies</i> .	• Assign mentors or liaisons for new teachers • Develop online toolkits or FAQs for common system navigation items • Advocate for simplified paperwork and digital solutions • Include teachers or department heads in district-level budget planning items • Establish procedures and protocol for transparency and ease of use • Email out links to previous years and/or current year budget documents • Invite teachers who are interested to board meetings to better understand policy
Professional development (PD) needs an overhaul	Many of the educators find current PD offerings irrelevant or impractical. PD should be tailored, hands-on, and context specific. Referencing P2, being involved in local or area PD drives pride, outreach, and purpose.	High <i>negative achievement</i> and low positive codes in <i>professional growth & development</i> across all participants.	• Offer micro-credentialing or short courses on specific skills or tasks • Provide stipends or release time for PD attendance • Survey staff to understand strengths and weaknesses • Encourage teacher-led PD or communities of practice based on survey data • Offer several different PD options so teachers have the chance to attend what might be most relevant to them • Integrate wellness and resilience-building into PD • Offer SWAP options for attending a content specific conference instead of district PD • Offer incentives for presenting at local or regional conferences • Host regional PD for area or local teachers with grants or area professionals
Boundary-setting is empowering	Setting boundaries and maintaining work-life balance leads to more positive emotions and less distress among educators.	Moderate to high <i>engaged</i> and <i>positive achievement</i> in <i>boundaries & balance</i> , with low levels of <i>distress</i> .	• Provide access to confidential counseling or employee wellness programs • Promote flexible scheduling or quiet hours when emails are not expected • Encourage leadership to model healthy boundaries • Develop policies that limit after-hours work expectations • Provide instruction on delayed-delivery email settings • Communicate healthy staff boundaries to parents and community as policy

Coping Strategies of Instrumental Music Educators and the Funding Process

To address research question three, targeted interview questions were used to gather information on support systems, coping strategies, and boundaries employed by instrumental music educators. Table 5.2 highlights the questions that provided insight into the information gathered on coping mechanisms. The responses to these questions formed the framework for an emergent theory on how educators cope with the funding process.

Table 5.2. Questions Pertaining to Coping Strategies of Instrumental Music Educators

Area of Focus	Questions Pertaining to Coping Strategies
Support Systems and Relationships	• Do you have any support systems or strategies you have put in place? • Who do you talk with for support or advice? • Are there supports you wish were available within the school system? • How do you associate the role of advocacy to the funding process?
Professional Development, Training, and Preparation	• Were there any parts of your music education degree training that you feel helped prepare you to navigate program funding? • Have you seen or explored any professional development that relates to work-life stress or emotional management?
Coping/Boundaries	• How would you describe your feelings about the funding process? • Are there ways you manage some of those emotional aspects with the funding process? • Have you found strategies that help you process stress from work or school? • Are there specific goals or boundaries you've put in place as you've gone through this process?
Funding Process & Impact	• What is your understanding of how funding for your program is determined? • Can you share how you believe your school's funding structure impacts your program and students? • Are there examples of how financial constraints affected student participation or a learning outcome?

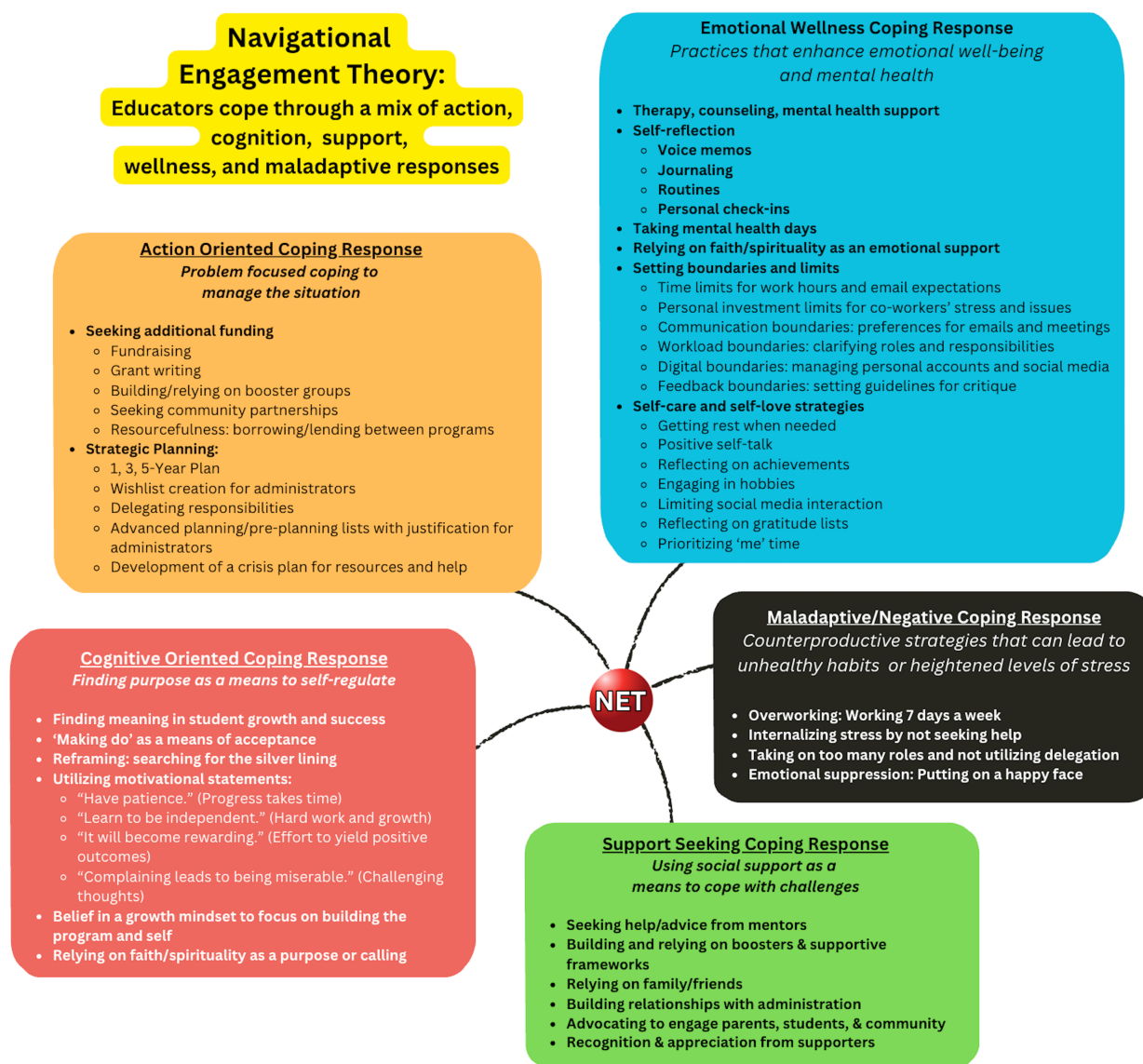
Emergent Theory of Navigational Engagement

Recommended Strategies for Navigating the Funding Process. The responses to the targeted questions were examined and placed into a large list of strategies. The tables in Chapter 4 display the categorization of the data based on coping mechanisms within six categories: (1) seeking additional funding, (2) strategic planning, (3) acceptance, (4) seeking support, (5) mental

and well-being, and (6) maladaptive/negative. The participants in this study embraced active engagement to turn their challenges into opportunities for creative problem-solving.

Branches of Coping. Using the responses of the music educators, five categories of coping were identified. This theory emphasizes the critical need for training and professional development for future and current educators. In figure 5.1, each branch represents a different mode of coping. The branches include (1) direct action responses, (2) internal mindset, (3) social support, (4) self-care, and (5) maladaptive habits. Strategies are placed within each branch based on the nature of the problem target. Strategies include reframing an internal experience, leveraging social support, promoting emotional health, and recognizing unhealthy habits leading to chronic stress.

Figure 5.1. Navigational Engagement Theory Diagram of the 5 Educator Coping Branches



Action Oriented Response. The orange section highlights the practical and problem-focused response. These strategies are direct steps that educators can take to solve problems, secure resources, and create stability. Examples of this branch include seeking additional funding from outside resources, strategic planning, and resourcefulness through sharing resources and utilizing booster groups. Even though most of the action-oriented items are standard practice for those seeking funding, the implementation of strategic planning is a must. Stability requires

communicating a plan with administration for a 1, 3, 5-year plan so that program needs are understood, allowing administration some time to problem-solve. Responsibility delegation includes working with booster or supportive groups, but also working with other colleagues. Departmental cooperation and cross-curricular opportunities all require advanced planning. Working with others well in advance allows delegation and sharing of task lists.

The Crisis Plan. The crisis plan is a critical piece of the action-oriented response. A crisis plan is a tool, a strategy, and a mindset all in one safeguard. No matter what financial challenge arises, future and current music educators should have a backup plan or a secondary support plan for funding. School funding can change suddenly due to cuts, policy shifts, or emergencies. A crisis plan helps to prepare for the unexpected. The reduced stress provides peace of mind and sense of control during financial uncertainty, relieving the stress mentioned by some of the participants of this study. An outline of alternative funding sources offers stability and helps to protect student opportunities. Cost-saving measures and priorities should be considered as educators adapt their curricular programming to reflect the shift in finances. Preparation for difficult times demonstrates to administrators an ability to be proactive, resourceful, and committed to sustaining the program. Lists of local grants, fundraising ideas that match the community's goals and values, potential donors and program funders, and local businesses in the community are all great ideas for placing in a crisis plan.

Cognitive Oriented Response. This branch involves coping through mental reframing. Educators find meaning in challenges and use positive thinking, acceptance, growth mindset, and sometimes faith/spirituality to regulate their emotions and find meaning. Finding the silver lining in any experience is great way to focus on the positive aspects, while working on problem-

solving for the areas that need improvement. Coping through cognitive strategies includes using motivational statements like the following:

- (1) Having patience. (Progress takes time)
- (2) Learn to be independent. (Hard work and growth)
- (3) It will become rewarding. (Effort yields positive outcomes)
- (4) Complaining leads to being miserable. (Challenging negative thoughts)

Support Seeking Coping Response. This branch of coping involves turning to others for help. Utilizing mentors for advice and encouragement and seeking feedback or resources from others are both strategies within this branch. Educators build networks with colleagues, family, boosters, and community members. The connections that are built help to offer practical assistance and emotional support when needed. Advocating for the use of booster groups and students' parents offers the ability to delegate and engage others. It is also effective to strategize ways to use recognition and appreciation from supporters. Creating a jar of positive notes received from students or others offers social support during challenging moments.

Emotional Wellness Coping Response. This area utilizes practices that enhance emotional well-being and mental health. This includes therapy, self-reflection, setting boundaries, and engaging in self-care routines. The goal is to take a few moments to refocus positive energy on oneself and to allow the feelings of the moment to pass. Educators from this study utilized voice memos, outdoor walks, journaling, routines, and personal check-ins to refocus on themselves. Mental health days should be used in moderation and never abused, however if personal health is at stake, a day to refocus positive energy is much healthier for the profession than a teacher leaving the field due to burnout from overwork.

Boundaries. The educators from this study made efforts to set several different types of boundaries. The obvious ones are always social media, email, and time in the office, but there are many other areas for healthy boundary placement. When a staff member volunteers to listen to other staff members complain or discuss their issues, it is a voluntary effort to support them. If it is intentional, then that is wonderful. But how many times have educators experienced the complaints of other teachers in the lounge or at lunch, only to leave feeling emotionally exhausted themselves? Emotional investment in others is a choice. Some participants discussed never entering the staff lounge as a boundary they set for their emotional health.

Communication boundaries are another option for healthy coping strategies. Do booster or parent groups require extensive meetings? Decide ahead of time how many meetings will be held. Pre-set the agenda. Communicate necessary information via email well in advance and provide links to where to find the information if there are questions. A frequently asked questions (FAQ) section on the website also makes a great link to include in response to questions about needed information. Clarifying roles and responsibilities and having clear guidelines addresses many delegation needs. Depending on the program, it may be helpful to utilize a committee of willing parents for each event.

Setting guidelines for healthy critique is not always easy. If critique and feedback are not offering positive information, growth and emotional engagement suffer. An educator can start by initiating the conversation.

- (1) Request a meeting specifically to talk about feedback and professional growth.
- (2) Be open and communicate the desire for constructive feedback to support development as an educator.

- (3) Define *healthy critique*. Ask for specific and actionable feedback that is focused on behaviors or outcomes, not personal attributes.
- (4) Set expectations for communication:
 - a. Ask for feedback to be delivered in a timely manner, after being observed.
 - b. Request feedback that is balanced between areas of strengths and areas for improvement.
 - c. Encourage a two-way dialogue for asking questions and sharing perspectives.
- (5) Agree on a format and frequency for feedback: preference for verbal or written.
- (6) Request privacy and professionalism.

Self-care and Self-love Strategies. This area involves getting enough rest when needed and using positive self-talk. Reflecting on achievements and growth can be effective and helpful. Engaging in hobbies, limiting social media interaction, and utilizing gratitude lists are also beneficial. This category prioritizes *me* time and helps to focus positive energy back on the individual.

Maladaptive/Negative Coping Response. Everyone operates in the maladaptive or negative coping branch at certain times. During those moments, there are few options outside of suppressing negative feelings, and simply getting the required task done. The issue arises when no other strategies are being employed. The unconscious decision to internalize stress by not seeking help or by taking on too many responsibilities is counterproductive and can lead to heightened levels of stress. Repeatedly overworking or suppressing emotions leads to unhealthy habits and harmful coping mechanisms that can develop under chronic stress. These items offer short-term relief but often lead to greater stress or burnout over time (Ingersol, 2002; Greenburg et al., 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Thompson, 2017).

Conceptual Framework for Emergent Theory Development. Using interpretivism as the guiding framework throughout this phenomenological study allowed me to immerse myself in the participants' perspectives and to guide the development of the emergent theory's categories. Studying how each participant managed their situation allowed for the development of the five branches of coping. Participants were (1) actively taking actions toward problem management, (2) cognitively trying to find a purpose for self-regulation, (3) using social support strategies such as mentorship or supportive relationships to cope, (4) utilizing mental health strategies for emotional wellness, and (5) employing counterproductive strategies that can lead to unhealthy habits.

Strengths & Limitations

Strengths. One strength of this study is its strong focus on each educator's emotional associations. The emotional associations provided a deeper exploration of the funding process. Identifying points of frustration and pride, isolation, and disillusionment allowed for richer insight into the conversations and the strategies being discussed. The semi-structured interview format captured a diverse range of perspectives and allowed for clarifying questions for each participant. Emotional associations and coping strategies are highly personal in nature and were investigated fully by the research design. This study lays a solid foundation for future research. It emphasizes the need for training and development strategies that equip educators with the tools necessary to cope with and manage the stressors of the funding process.

Limitations. Given the sample size and the diverse characteristics of each school district, the study's outcomes may not be generalizable to the larger population. The responses of the educators were each personalized to their respective situations; however, the development of the

categories allows other educators to become familiar with alternative coping options that may be useful regardless of situation or location.

The coding and analysis process was member checked but relied heavily on my interpretation and association as the researcher. This is especially true for the participants who were not responsive to the member checking deadline request. Previous work in Title I schools allowed me to empathize with each perspective, but constant monitoring and reflexive work provided a way to check my own biases and served as guiding questions throughout the process. This reflexive journaling was used to actively maintain the interpretivist lens (see Appendix L for the summary of reflexive notes).

Actionable Recommendations

The findings of this study show that it is critical to address the practical and emotional realities of functioning as an instrumental music education teacher in a Title I school. The primary themes underscore the critical need of supportive relationships, transparent systems, meaningful professional development, and effective coping strategies.

Prioritize and Invest in Support Structures. District and school leaders should intentionally foster collaborative and supportive relationships through mentoring, peer observation, and networking opportunities. Survey staff for strengths and areas for growth, and look for ways to offer educators ownership over their development. Through the prioritization of structures that facilitate guidance, shared problem-solving, and emotional support, educators can build resilience and success strategies that reduce feelings of isolation.

Improve System Navigation and Transparency. Streamline processes and provide clear, accessible resources. Work to help educators understand and access available support with sustainable resources. Have educators who understand processes create instructional videos and

resources for those unfamiliar with them. Assign mentors or liaisons to new or struggling staff members as both emotional support and system guidance. Share budget document resources and allow teachers and/or department heads access to the budget planning process. These practical steps reduce frustration and empower staff members. As P3 stated, the comprehension of why a budget must shrink brings a different perspective and feelings to an educator. Understanding and empathy can bring the community together.

Redesign Professional Development (PD). PD offerings should be tailored to educators' specific content areas. Feelings of frustration and isolation arise when PD is generic and untailored. Hands-on and teacher-led options are effective for empowering staff and creating a community of ownership and support. Regularly survey staff to assess PD needs and offer incentives for presenting or attending conferences. Flexible options for choosing a PD that is most appropriate for their needs will improve engagement and relevance. Strategies for well-being, health, stress management, and resilience should be integrated into PD offerings for all educators.

Promote and Normalize Boundary-Setting. The process of shifting habits can be frustrating, disappointing, and is a journey. Encourage educators to pick two or three wellness boundaries to try. Leadership teams should model healthy practices for the staff. This can be achieved by establishing policies that limit after-hours work expectations, providing access to wellness resources, and communicating clear expectations and boundaries.

Encourage and Share Coping Strategies. School leadership should actively promote a culture that values self-reflection, growth mindset, asking questions, and seeking support. Sharing successful coping strategies among staff can foster community, resilience, and support. This also provides practical tools for managing stress and workload.

Future Research and Awareness. This study presents actionable insights, but further research is needed to develop and test these strategies across diverse educational settings. Pilot programs should be developed to evaluate specific interventions, including mentorship programs, revised PD models, and streamlined funding processes for transparency and ease of use/access. The evaluation and impact of those areas will help determine generalizability across diverse settings.

Stakeholders must recognize the direct impact that relevant PD, transparent practices, healthy coping strategies, and supportive learning communities have on teacher retention and engagement. Empathetic approaches support healthier work environments and ultimately improve student equity and learning outcomes.

Implementing these recommendations can reduce educator burnout and improve job satisfaction. A more sustainable and resilient educational environment can be created. An environment where educators are easily able to understand the structural needs, but also recognize the importance of validating the emotions arising from the process. Additional research is needed, but the strategies identified here offer a firm foundation for future advancement and improvement in supporting instrumental music educators in Title I schools.

This research revealed the challenges and the deep commitment that music educators bring to their work. Through their voices, we see that meaningful support, transparent systems, relevant PD, and healthy coping mechanisms are more than beneficial... they are essential for sustainability. By accepting these insights and putting them into action, a more equitable, sustainable, and inspiring educational experience for teachers and students can be built.

These recommendations are only as strong as the voices behind them. To close, the words of the educators themselves best capture the heart of this work.

Curtain Call: The Mission & Impact

The following are direct quotations from the research participants. Ultimately, as these educators revealed, it is their sense of mission that sustains their journey.

- - - (*begin stage play*)- - -

[Right spotlight comes up on MUSIC EDUCATOR: P1. The silence is calm and comfortable.]

MUSIC EDUCATOR: P1

[They are smiling and filled with pride and purpose.]

My goal is to meet the students where they are and make them the best that they can possibly be.

[Right spotlight fades from MUSIC EDUCATOR: P1. A second spotlight comes up on the left for MUSIC EDUCATOR: P2.]

MUSIC EDUCATOR: P2

[Exhibiting appreciation and satisfaction.]

I love seeing the growth of the students year after year. Having taught K through 12, I've now had students where I've seen them every day for 13 years through multiple cycles. And to see them grow from very little people to young adults ready to tackle the world and to help form that person's outlook on the world... their outlook on life and their skillsets is something I value.

[Left spotlight fades from MUSIC EDUCATOR: P2. Stage right spotlight comes back up on MUSIC EDUCATOR: P3.]

MUSIC EDUCATOR: P3

[Glancing down and back up. Reflective smile and gentle conviction.]

The goal for me is to get rid of me. I want them to be able to participate in music without needing me, you know, on their own. I want them to have the skills, the knowledge, the know how to do it, that they can do what they want to do, without having to come to me or to anybody else for help.

[Spotlight fades from MUSIC EDUCATOR: P3. The left spotlight comes back up on MUSIC EDUCATOR: P7]

MUSIC EDUCATOR: P7

[Filled with passion and mission.]

There is no barrier for entry. It doesn't matter where you come from, what your family is, or how much money you have, we will figure out a way for you to participate.

[Spotlight fades from MUSIC EDUCATOR:P7 and the stage lights dim to darkness.]

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Appendix A – Initial Recruitment Email and Survey Link

Subject: Now Recruiting Participants: Title I Instrumental Music Educators Study

Colleagues and Friends,

I hope this message finds you well. I'm excited to share that I am now ready to begin gathering participants for my research study, "Navigating the Funding Process: A Qualitative Descriptive Study of Perspectives from Instrumental Music Educators from Title I Schools."

If you know any middle or high school band or orchestra directors in NY, FL, IL, TX, or CA, I would greatly appreciate it if you could pass this message—and the interest survey link below—along to them. Sharing the invitation through your network is especially helpful, as it helps me prevent bias as the researcher and ensures a broader range of perspectives.

Participation involves a brief, one-hour Zoom interview. All responses will remain anonymous. This is a valuable opportunity for educators to share their experiences and insights on navigating the funding process in Title I schools.

[Here's the link to the interest survey: Research Interest Form.](#)

Thank you so much for your support in spreading the word. I look forward to connecting with these outstanding educators!

Best regards,

<Insert Signature>

Note: The title of the study changed during the research process. The study described here is the same as the research reported in this dissertation.

Appendix B - Informed Consent Form

Appendix Figure B. 1. Informed consent form

Informed Consent

Title of Research:

**Navigating the Funding Process: A Qualitative Descriptive Study of Perspectives
from Instrumental Music Educators from Title 1 Schools**

Study Contact Information: Heather Baker Kansas State University Responsible Graduate Student 765-465-3323 hnbaker@ksu.edu	Principal Investigator: Dr. Frederick Burrack Director of Graduate Studies in Music fburrack@ksu.edu	Institutional Contact Kansas State University IRB Chair: Dr. Lisa Rubin: rubin@ksu.edu Office of Research, Compliance, and Security: 765-532-3224
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1. Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Thank you for considering participation in this research. This study will explore how music educators in Title 1 schools navigate complex funding structures. Your participation will provide valuable insights into barriers and effective strategies.

2. Description of the Research Process

An initial interest study aims to identify music educators in Title I schools willing to share their experiences and insights through a simple 10-question multiple-choice survey.

Upon agreeing to participate, we will arrange a 60-minute Zoom interview discussion on funding processes within your school. All responses will be recorded and confidential. You are welcome to take breaks, skip any questions you prefer not to answer, or conclude the conversation at any point. Participants can withdraw from the survey or interview at any time, without penalty. Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

3. Potential Risks and Discomforts

There are no significant risks involved with this study.

4. Potential Benefits

Participating in this research enables educators to share their experiences and contribute to funding discussions. It acknowledges their work with music education, offers emotional support, and highlights the importance of their contributions.

5. Confidentiality

All names and details will remain confidential, with participant numbers used for anonymity. Zoom recordings will be securely stored on my computer using Touch ID encryption and will be deleted after the research is completed. Your identity will not be disclosed in the reports, and this data will not be shared with other investigators without additional informed consent.

Authorization

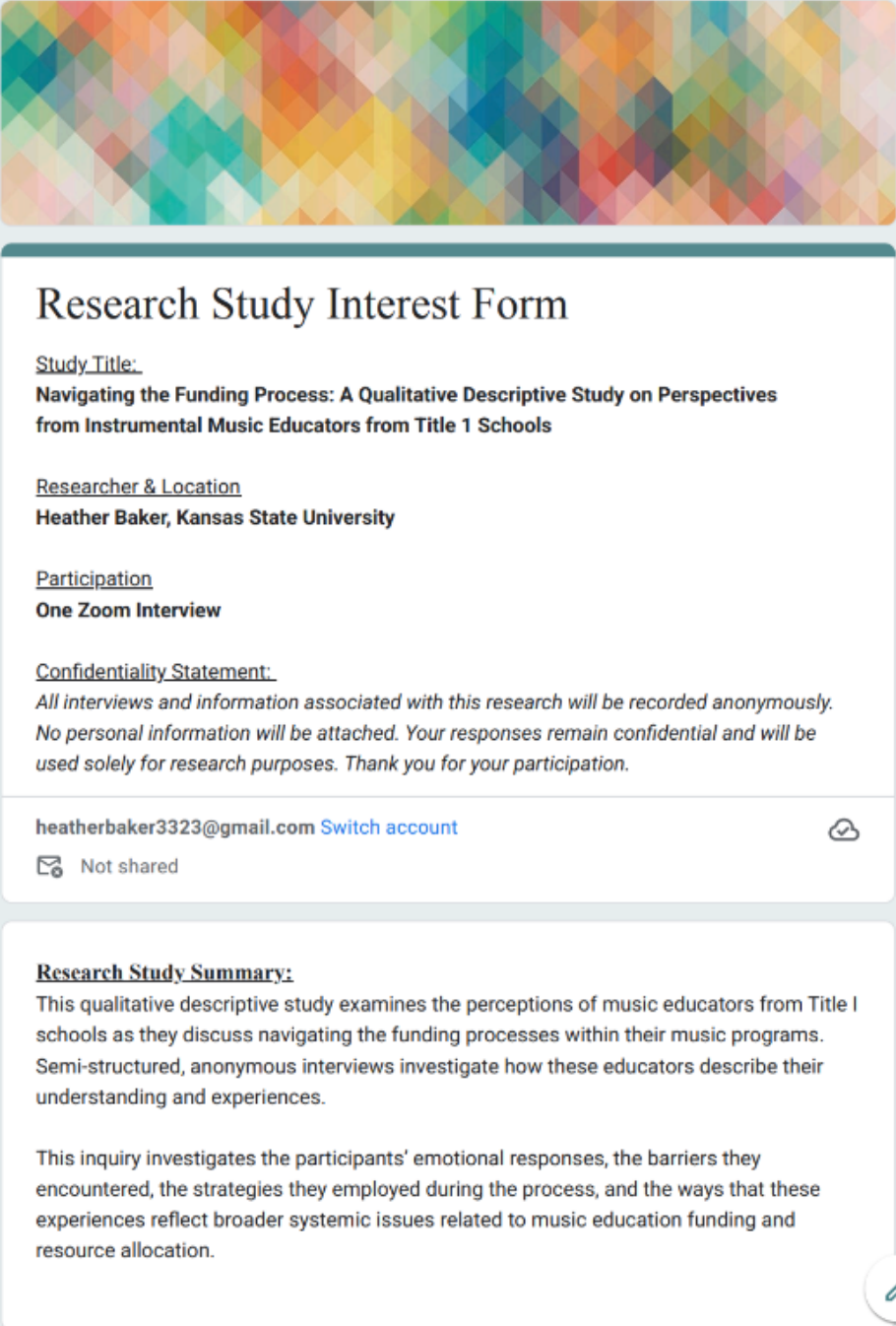
Name of Participant (Print): _____
Signature: _____ Date: _____
Person Obtaining Consent (Print): _____
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Note: Participants will receive a copy of this signed form.

Note: The title of the study changed during the research process. The study described here is the same as the research reported in this dissertation.

Appendix C - Initial Interest Survey

Appendix Figure C. 1. Initial interest survey



Research Study Interest Form

Study Title:
Navigating the Funding Process: A Qualitative Descriptive Study on Perspectives from Instrumental Music Educators from Title 1 Schools

Researcher & Location
Heather Baker, Kansas State University

Participation
One Zoom Interview

Confidentiality Statement:
All interviews and information associated with this research will be recorded anonymously. No personal information will be attached. Your responses remain confidential and will be used solely for research purposes. Thank you for your participation.

heatherbaker3323@gmail.com [Switch account](#)

Not shared

Research Study Summary:
This qualitative descriptive study examines the perceptions of music educators from Title I schools as they discuss navigating the funding processes within their music programs. Semi-structured, anonymous interviews investigate how these educators describe their understanding and experiences.

This inquiry investigates the participants' emotional responses, the barriers they encountered, the strategies they employed during the process, and the ways that these experiences reflect broader systemic issues related to music education funding and resource allocation.

Note: The title of the study changed during the research process. The study described here is the same as the research reported in this dissertation.

School Title 1 Status:

Do you currently teach instrumental music in a Title 1 school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Teaching Experience:

How many years have you been teaching?

- ☐ 0-2 years
- ☐ 3-6 years
- ☐ 7-12 years
- ☐ 13+ years

Program Demographics:

Is your teaching position primarily focused on Middle School or High School instruction?

- ☐ Middle School
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Both
- ☐ Neither

Program Demographics:

Is your teaching position primarily Band or Orchestra?

- ☐ Band
- ☐ Orchestra
- ☐ Other

School Demographics:

What state do you teach in?

- ☐ New York
- ☐ Florida
- ☐ Texas
- ☐ Illinois
- ☐ California

School Demographics:

What is the total student enrollment at your school?

(Not District Enrollment)

- ☐ Less than 300
- ☐ 301 to 500
- ☐ 501 to 900
- ☐ 901 or Greater

Funding Awareness:

How familiar are you with the funding process in your district?

- ☐ I have no experience working with the funding process for my program.
- ☐ I have a basic understanding of the funding processes, but have not been directly involved in navigating them.
- ☐ I am knowledgeable about the funding processes and have had some experience in navigating them for my program.
- ☐ I have extensive understanding and experience with the funding processes and actively participate in seeking out and managing funding for my program.

Interest in Sharing Experiences:

Would you be willing to share your personal experiences and perceptions regarding your experiences with funding for your program?

- ☐ Yes, I am interested.
- ☐ Maybe, I would like more information.
- ☐ No, I am not interested.

Interest in Contributing Insight:

Do you believe that your insights and experiences could contribute to a better understanding of the issues faced by music educators in Title 1 schools?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Possibly
- ☐ No

Willingness to Participate:

**Would you be interested in participating in 1 zoom interview for this study?
(Scheduled at your convenience)**

- ☐ Yes, please contact me with more information.
- ☐ Maybe, please contact me with more information.
- ☐ Not at this time.

If you showed interest in the question above, please let me know how you prefer to be contacted.

Name:

Your answer _____

Preferred email address:

Your answer _____

Preferred phone number:

Your answer _____

Best time of day to reach you:

Your answer _____



Thank you for participating!

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about this study, please feel free to reach out.

Thank you again for your support.

Heather Baker
Kansas State University
765-465-3323
hnbaker@ksu.edu

Submit

Page 1 of 1

Clear form

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Appendix D - Interview Protocol Guide

Appendix Figure D. 1. Interview protocol guide containing interview questions

Interview Guide

Participant ID#: _____ Interview Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Participant Consents to be Digitally Recorded: YES NO

Interview Start Time: _____ Interview End Time: _____

Section A: Introduction & Rapport Building
Establishes professional and program context, focusing on factual and descriptive information.

Background Information:

A. Can you describe your professional background and your path to teaching at your current school?

B. (If already known ____). What grade subjects and levels do you currently teach?

Program Overview

A. How would you describe the student population you work with?

B. What are the main objectives of your program?

Professional Identity & Values

A. What aspects of teaching instrumental music do you find most meaningful?

B. What do you consider important in your professional learning?

Section B: Funding Process Experience
Explores knowledge, involvement, and practical experiences with funding, with neutral phrasing.

Understanding of Funding: *Inquire about any specifics mentioned...*

A. What is your understanding of how funding for your program is determined?

B. Can you describe how your program fits within your district's allocation process?

C. Could you talk a little about any of your district's funding sources? Taxes, state or federal funding?

D. What role do you play in your program's funding process?

C. Can you discuss how you learned to work within your school's funding structure?

Funding within the Program

A. What methods have you used to secure resources for your program?

B. (If not mentioned) - Have you ever applied for grants or fundraised?
If so, what was that experience like?

C. (If not mentioned) - Can you share how you believe your school's funding structure shapes or impacts your program and your students?

F. Do you have any examples of how a financial constraint has affected student participation and or learning outcomes?

Interview Guide

G. *(If not mentioned)* Is there any connection to extra-curriculars and professional development?

H. How do you associate the role of advocacy with the funding process?

I. Does evaluation have any ties to your program's funding?

Perceptions of Challenges and Constraints

A. What challenges, if any, have you encountered in obtaining funding?

B. What is your perception of the transparency of your school district's funding process?

C. (possible question) Do you feel this funding process or model is sustainable for your program?

Effective Strategies

A. Are there specific financial strategies that you found to be particularly effective?

B. *(If not mentioned)* Do you have any experience with a booster group or PTO group?

Section C: Emotional and Relational Perspectives

Invites personal perspectives, both emotional and relational, while allowing for a wide range of experiences.

Emotional Experience:

A. How would you describe your feelings about the funding process?

B. Can you share any experiences that highlight the connection between funding and your emotional response?

C. Are there ways you manage the emotional aspects of working with funding processes?

D. Has dealing with the funding process had any effect on your personal life; showing up anytime outside of your professional life?

C. Can you describe a particularly challenging moment during the funding process when you were faced with a difficult decision?

a. What emotions did you feel as you navigated that challenge?

b. How did you cope with those feelings?

c. In your experience, do you think your emotional state ever impacts your instruction? *(if so, is there a time when this may have happened?)*

Relationships and Community

A. Are there supports you wish were available?

B. How, if at all, do you communicate the needs of your program to others?

C. How does funding relate to your interactions with students, colleagues, administrators, or families?

D. Can you reflect on a moment when emotions from funding led to a change in your teaching practice or philosophy?

Coping Strategies

A. How do you usually cope with work stress and emotions?

B. How effective do you feel these strategies have been for managing those feelings?

C. Can you talk about any support systems you have in place?

Interview Guide

- D. Can you discuss any self-care routines or adjustments that you have implemented to manage emotions?
- E. Have you explored any professional development to help manage emotions or stress?
- F. Are there any specific goals or boundaries that have provided relief or support?

Previous Training

- A. Were there any parts of your music education degree training that you feel helped prepare you to navigate program funding?
- B. Are there any specific tools or strategies that you have found useful or helpful when handling funding?
- C. (If not fully explored previously) Have you participated in or seen any professional development opportunities that specifically focused on program funding or financial processes?

Section D: Looking Forward & Closing

Frames the goals and positive outlook for the future. Enables participants to expand on topics that are important to them, thereby supporting emergent themes.

Looking Forward

- A. What are your goals for your program in the future?
- B. As you look toward the future, is there any guidance you would like to share with administrators and policymakers?
- C. Is there anything else you'd like to include or discuss?

Thank them for taking the time to participate and for sharing their perspectives and experiences.

Explain the next steps: Generate and double-check the transcript against the audio file. I will reach out when they are ready to be checked for accuracy.

Appendix E - Transcript Sample

Appendix Figure E. 1. Transcript sample

Theme Code	Transcript	Initial Coding: Emotional Codes
	I: OK, what is your perception of the transparency within your school's funding process? P: It's very good. If I have questions, I get answers. I have enough of a background in school finance. I understand the terminology usually, but I also can explain it to people. We know where every dollar is. We know that every superintendent has a budgeting trick they use to make sure they end the year in the black, which is you allocate money towards things you know you're not going to spend. That way it's there at the end of the year. We have our most intense discussions here over insurance. Because insurance is everything. And we lost our biggest provider in the area last year. So now we're a one provider region, which means you can't negotiate really. But, you know, getting everybody on the same page on why insurance costs what it does. And I've done presentations before with parents. Why is the music program getting this much money? When you read the board packet every month and you see my coded lines take up a whole page for bills being paid, I say that's one month. That's because it's probably August and we're paying everything in advance. Look at November, December, January, where I don't spend any money because everything's going. But we're able to access any numbers we need. We can have between our bookkeeper and our superintendent and the principal, a door closed when I asked a question. So your itemized payments, purchases, everything, it shows up in the board documents. Yes. The board has about 150 page packet every month. They list every bill down to the dollar. And it's also lists on there, your purchase order number. So like if I have a PO for new sheet music for a thousand dollars from a vendor, it will say that I've spent on the packet. It'll say I've spent 900 of that \$1,000. And if I go over, it shows I went over. And I, you know, we usually get a little flexibility if we go over or we find something else to not spend on. So, but yeah, it's very transparent. So. Yeah, that's nice. And that comes from, well, and it comes from before my time, not having that and people not being happy with that. So everyone wants to know where their money's going. So. And actually the weird thing is, and this doesn't happen a lot of places, the money we store, like my fundraising money in the school, it goes into an activity fund, but it's not school money. That spending process and detailed items go in the board packet too. So if cheerleading goes to camp in the summer or if baseball is buying concession supplies, all of that is itemized every month. So you can't say people don't know. They just have to look for it. And it's a lot. A lot of times that's hidden. And what good is that? I: Right. It's just a chunk? P: Well, and you also have to assume that things are being spent with good intention. And by being open and transparent, you boost that. You support that concept. And sometimes things get spent and you wonder, why is the money going there? So you ask the question. Why does this person need a third one of these? But also you have to understand that in our district, if they're getting that, they've probably already made that case to the boss. So I'm never going to go ask a colleague, why are you getting more money for this? I trust you've made your case. And guess what? We're going to see all the paperwork on that in the end. So it's there. So, yeah.	

Appendix F - Emotional Codebook

Appendix Figure F. 1. Emotional codebook

Code Categories & Codes

1. Positive Achievement	2. Positive Relational	3. Eustress	4. Engaged
1. Pride	1. Gratitude	1. Hopefulness	1. Determination
2. Satisfaction	2. Admiration		2. Persistence
3. Joy	3. Trust		3. Resourcefulness
4. Relief	4. Empathy		4. Altruism/Selflessness
5. Appreciation	5. Contentment		5. Openness
			6. Patience
			7. Self-awareness/ Reflective
			8. Courage
			9. Protectiveness
			10. Sacrifice
			11. Faith-Based



5. Negative Achievement	6. Negative Relational 	7. Distress	8. Disengaged
1. Frustration	1. Loneliness	1. Stress	1. Neutrality
2. Disappointment	2. Isolation	2. Overwhelm	
3. Impatience	3. Abandonment	3. Exhaustion/Fatigue	
4. Bitterness/Irritation	4. Disillusionment	4. Anxiety	
5. Concern	5. Vulnerability		

Appendix G - Emotional Code Definitions

Appendix Figure G. 1. Emotional code definitions and quote samples

Categories and Codes	Sample Quote from Narrative	Definition
1: Positive Achievement		
• Pride	"I'm so proud of how far we've come."	Emotions arising from personal or group accomplishment.
• Satisfaction	"It's satisfying to see the kids perform well."	
• Joy	"It's pure joy when students have that 'aha' moment."	
• Relief	"Getting that funding was a huge relief."	
• Appreciation	"I really appreciate the support from our boosters."	
2: Positive Relational		
• Gratitude	"I'm grateful for my supportive administration."	Emotions focused on connection, support, and positive regard for others.
• Admiration	"I admire how hard my students work."	
• Trust	"I trust my boosters to handle fundraising."	
• Empathy	"I empathize with students struggling at home."	
• Contentment	"I'm content with the way my team works together."	
3: Eustress		
• Hopefulness	"I'm hopeful our program will keep growing."	Emotions related to positivity for the future.
4: Engagement		
• Determination	"I'm determined to get instruments for every student."	Emotions and states reflecting action, adjustment, and constructive responses to challenges.
• Persistence	"We kept applying for grants until one came through."	
• Resourcefulness	"I found used instruments at thrift stores."	
• Selflessness	"I spent my own money so no child would go without."	
• Openness	"I admit what I don't know and ask for help."	
• Patience	"I know change takes time in this district."	
• Self-awareness	"I realized I needed better boundaries."	
• Courage	"I spoke up at the board meeting despite nerves."	
• Protectiveness	"I won't let funding cuts hurt my students' opportunities."	
• Sacrifice	"I spent my own money so no child would go without."	
	"I'm not going to let a negative emotion get in the way of what God has called me to do."	
5: Negative Achievement		
• Frustration	"It was frustrating to fill out forms and never get a response."	Emotions related to setbacks, failures, or dissatisfaction with outcomes or progress.
• Disappointment	"I was disappointed when our grant was denied."	
• Impatience	"I'm impatient with all the red tape."	
• Bitterness/Irritation	"It irks me when our achievements aren't recognized."	
• Concern	"I'm concerned about losing more students next year."	
6: Negative Relational		
• Loneliness	"I'm the only music teacher in the district."	

• Isolation • Abandonment • Disillusionment • Vulnerability	“I work in a rural district and rarely see colleagues.” “The district just ignores our needs.” “I thought admin would help, but nothing changed.” “Talking about my burnout feels risky, but it is real.”	Emotions about lack of connection, support, or belonging; social pain or criticism.
7: Distress		
• Stress • Overwhelm • Exhaustion/Fatigue • Anxiety	“I’m stressed about meeting everyone’s needs.” “There’s just too much on my plate.” “I’m exhausted from late nights and weekend events.” “I’m anxious about funding for next semester.”	Emotions tied to pressure, threat, or danger to self or program.
8: Disengaged		
• Neutrality	“Our district has 350 students in two buildings.”	Unbiased, factual, and detached.

Appendix H - Primary Theme Codebook

Appendix Figure H. 1. Primary theme codebook

Thematic Codebook		Primary Themes:
A	Demographics	Program Impact & Mission - Perception of Impact on Program & Student Learning. - Mission Oriented: "Call to Contribute"
B	Impact on Program & Student Learning	
C	Personal Contribution (Financial/Time)	
D	Lack of Training or Clarity	
E	District Funding Item	
F	Federal Funding Item	
G	Financial Accounts	Roles, Relationships, & Support - Impacts of Others: Relationships & Connections - Perception of Support: Peer, Admin, Mentors, Booster, Partnership
H	Legal or Policy Regulation	
I	Fundraising Strategies	
J	Teacher turnover	
K	Vocalizing Needs	Navigating Systems & Strategies - Understanding of the Funding Process - Legal or Policy Regulation Item - Perspectives on the Importance of Advocacy or Visibility (Community, School) - Perceptions of Transparency Tactics in Action: Navigational Approaches
L	Relationships & Connections	
M	Funding Process Item	
N	Grants	
O	Inadequate or Broken Equipment/Materials	
P	Service at Capacity	
Q	Advocacy or Visibility (Community, School)	
R	Obstacle/Repercussion	
S	Transparency	Professional Growth & Development - Perception of a Lack of Training or Clarity - Interaction with PD Item
T	Boundary or Balance Strategy	
U	Work Stress	
V	Support (Peer/Admin/Mentors/Booster/Partnership)	
W	PD Item	Boundaries & Balance - Implementation of Boundary or Balance Strategy
X	Roles	
Y	Strategies	

Appendix I – Thematic Coding Definitions

Appendix Figure I. 1. Thematic coding definitions and quote sample

Codes	Sample Quote from Narrative	Definition
Demographics	"The students I have are great. Most of the students I have are first generation from Mexico. We're about 30 miles from the border. I do occasionally have students who cross the border in the morning. But a lot of students, most of the students, I would say, are first generation students from Mexico. They're great. I mean, the students I have are wonderful. They work really hard. They understand that education is important."	Basic descriptive information about the school or student population (e.g., socioeconomic status, race, rural/urban, size).
Impact on Program & Student Learning	"The funding structure impacts the program and the students very drastically. It impacts the students first just by not having access to a lot of things that they see other folks have access to. Like they're unable to have certain pieces of equipment or certain quality equipment or while they're in their hands it impacts them what they're supposed to be learning and then secondly aside from the ability the basic abilities just to be able to function or have the things it also really impacts them mentally as there's a lot of comparing themselves to other groups or other programs..."	How financial processes or resources affect educational opportunities, student experiences, or learning outcomes.
Personal Contribution (Financial/Time)	"I have probably given three to four trumpets to the school over the years. I've given three clarinets to the school over the years. I make sure they're good to use, they're safe to use. I clean them out, I fix them a little bit, and I bring them to the school."	Instances where the teacher personally gives time or money to support the program.
Lack of Training or Clarity	"I would love it if when teachers who are new to California or new in general were given a walkthrough on the funding process or some sort of education about the funding process... There are a lot of really good things I could learn about how funding works."	Situations where teachers feel unprepared or unclear about procedures, especially funding or administrative processes.
District Funding Item	"This new super I love because she says she said right off the bat, give me a one year, three-year, five-year plan for repertoire, for equipment, for performance fees, because nothing's cheap anymore and nothing's free. Determining that amount, I will propose a number. She will ask questions about it. And often I'll get the number I ask for because I can justify why we're using it."	Statements about how the school district allocates, determines, or manages funding.
Federal Funding Item	"And then, you know, you're AG your CTE— all that's kind of funded that way and then the whatever monies they get back from the CTE— that pays the portion of the CTE teachers for their stipends for that class... And, you know, we do get a little bit of that oil refinery money from the area because we're right on the cusp of that."	References to federal grants, programs, or compliance (e.g., Title I, ESSER) influencing resources.
Financial Accounts	"Our club account, we can fundraise like through like, we have like a winter wonderland event where we can sell ice cream and we have like a, you know, just different events where we can fundraise. Um, at the concert, we sell concessions, that kind of thing. Um, and then we also have a booster account which we can use for other purposes. So if we want to buy refreshments for the kids, that comes from the club account. If we want to get a bus to go to a field trip, that comes from the booster account."	Mentions of specific accounts (e.g., booster, club, ASB) or fund management strategies within the program.
Legal or Policy Regulation	"In California, what that looks like is we have something called the Williams Act, which means that students are not required to purchase any school supplies. If we ask them to get a supply, we have to provide it, meaning in these band and orchestra classes, we have a lot, lot, lot of school instruments."	References to laws or policies (e.g., Williams Act, Prop 28) affecting music education or

		funding.
Fundraising Strategies	"We use a company called Vertical Raise here. I use it here at (school). We also use it at the youth orchestras, and it's very, very good at tying up loose ends and making everyone finish in the black because it's just a little contribution from everyone."	Descriptions of methods or approaches used to raise additional funds for the program.
Teacher Turnover	"We don't have turnover. We hired two new teachers last year, none the year before. Coming out of COVID, we only had to hire a bus driver. That's it. We were fully staffed. So I am in my 22nd year and I am eighth on the seniority list out of 60 people that don't leave here."	Comments about teacher retention, attrition, or staff stability within the school or district.
Vocalizing Needs	"If we're going to do this, I want you to come in and see how it's used and see why the benefit exists. You have to be open to being watched. You have to be open to explaining yourself."	How teachers communicate or advocate for their needs, especially regarding resources or support.
Relationships & Connections	"I have a group of parents that will rush the gates of hell with a water gun for me, if I ask. Yes, they do not care about the chain of command half the time. They'll go straight to the superintendent and be like, why don't they have this? Which is awesome, but also sometimes it's a headache for me."	The importance of building relationships—with parents, colleagues, community, or administration—for program success.
Funding Process Item	"So I am in control of everything except for sending out the payment. I have to write my POs out. Well, first I get a requisition form. I have to get a quote. Then I put it into the program we use—it shoots over to my business office then they shoot me back a PO. I get an invoice, then we pay it out and so I get to see what my budget is at all times."	Details about the steps, paperwork, or procedures involved in securing or managing program funds.
Grants	"I just recently last year got the Casey's grant. Casey's, the gas station, has a school grant process that goes anywhere from \$2,000 to \$15,000. I put in and what they ask for is your school background, your school data. And what are you going to spend it on? ... and got a check for \$15,000 about six weeks later."	Experiences with applying for, receiving, or using grant funding.
Inadequate or Broken Equipment/Materials	"Right here is an example—I have an old cello bow—first of all, it's still tightened, second of all there's hair coming off of it—it's held together with a little bit of tape—you know, so... but yeah, like I would love to buy new instruments or get the instruments that we have that are good instruments repaired."	References to damaged, outdated, or insufficient instruments and materials.
Service at Capacity	"In my advanced, I can go over 50 if I sign off on it. And I'm happy to do that with advanced students. I think I had 52 a couple years ago. So I just signed off and said, that's great. I want 52 in my advanced class. The beginner class is when you have about 45 to 50. It can be a tough environment."	Situations where classes, resources, or staff are stretched to their limits.
Advocacy or Visibility (Community, School)	"I try to make our program as public as possible. When we started playing at pep band things, I made sure the announcer said before the game, 'And here to kick things off as our (City) pep band...' and we would start playing and that kind of thing. So I want people to know. I want people to know, A, we exist, and B, we're trying to grow and get better."	Efforts to promote the program's value and presence in the school or wider community.
Obstacle/Repercussion	"I think the biggest challenge with obtaining funding here is understanding the process. Understanding the process, knowing who to talk to, who to ask, what a club fund is, what a booster account is. Knowing these different things is kind of the biggest—I don't want to say hindrance—it's the biggest obstacle to using the funding. It's just understanding the process."	Barriers or negative outcomes resulting from funding problems or process challenges.

Transparency	"The perception of the transparency is — I'm positive that it is incorrect. The first statistic that I can give you and really — the only one you need to know to back that up is that every year they give us a projected budget of about how much we are going to get in terms of money and how much we are going to spend. And then we always undershoot it. So we always have excess funds, but they won't report that."	The availability and clarity of information about funding decisions, allocations, or processes.
Boundary or Balance Strategy	"So I don't bring work home. I learned a long time to not bring work home. Sometimes I'm at work really late, so I don't bring it home. But I have another thing I have done... I stop at the (location), park my car, and I, every day, rain, shine, snow, sleet, break or not, I walk the full length of campus from one side of campus to (the other side) and back. It's a little over two miles... Almost all of my processing goes in that time."	Methods used to separate work from personal life or manage emotional demands.
Work Stress	"I mean, I got TMJ from it. I don't know if it's directly from that, but I've definitely, had some tension. But yeah, I am stressed about it a lot — and like concert week, you know the concert week is stressful for anyone, whether it's a title one school or they're in a very well-funded school, but just the funding process in general — worrying about it outside of school it's just — I feel like the more I do at the school, the more I have to do."	Statements reflecting emotional strain or pressure connected to funding, workload, or program management.
Support (Peer/Admin/Mentors/Booster/Partnership)	"My boosters are my ultimate fallback. Never done a GoFundMe or anything like that. You know, I try to get it where the students don't have to pay for anything or the parents don't have to pay for anything. Because, heck, these kids are food motivated. If I stop feeding, I'm in a band program. I love that. It's just taking it day by day, calling other directors for advice to give it a strategic, you know, legal wording."	Mentions of help or encouragement from colleagues, administration, boosters, or community partners.
Professional Development (PD) Item	"I actually have a series of presentations. I do stuff with music ed majors around the state. I do about 15 a year and I cover teaching in rural music. It's 'thriving and surviving in rural music education: being a department of one.' That's what I title it. I have one on 'life hates you and it's okay.' It's where I talk about, you know, how to read a pay stub, how to fill out HR documents. What's the vocabulary of insurance? You know, what is a co-pay is? You know, what co-insurance is? I do that presentation. I do one on, and this one I'm working on right now, I've done it twice and I've got to refine it: 'how to still like your job after 10 years.'"	References to professional development, formal or informal, related to funding, stress, or program management.
Roles	"I am the primary person when it comes to planning out ordering, processing orders as they come in. I'm the exception in that secretaries don't go through my boxes. They drop them off in my room and I process them only because it's just been that way for so long. But when it comes to determining vendors and things like that, I usually have the primary say, I try to keep everything as local as possible."	Teacher's in-school and outside roles, jobs, or experiences that contribute knowledge or responsibility to the program.
Strategies	"Advanced planning is everything. Knowing what we're going to do down the road and making a case for it and buying pieces of it as we go. For example, I have a really nice set of four concert toms. I didn't buy four at once. I bought two one year and two years later. I have a really nice wall of percussion accessories. That took me 20 years to build."	Specific approaches or planning techniques used to manage funding, resources, or challenges.

Appendix J - Participant Debrief Letter

Appendix Figure J. 1. Participant debrief letter

Subject: Thank You for Your Participation in My Research Study!

Greetings!

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks for taking the time to participate in this research study. Your insights and experiences have greatly enriched the depth of the study, and I appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts and perspectives.

As the research process ends, I want to assure you that your contribution plays a vital role in understanding the topic. Once the research and analysis are complete, I am happy to share a copy of the study with you if you are interested.

Thank you again for your participation and support. If you have any questions or would like to connect in the future, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Wishing you a wonderful rest of the school year filled with many successes and joys!

Take care,

HB

Researcher & Location

Kansas State University

Heather Baker, Responsible Graduate Student (hnbaker@ksu.edu)

Dr. Frederick Burrack, Director of Graduate Studies in Music (fburrack@ksu.edu)

Dr. Lisa Rubin, IRB Chair (rubin@ksu.edu)

Office of Research, Compliance, and Security (785-532-3224)

Appendix K – IRB Approval

Appendix Figure K. 1. CITI trainings

 Completion Date 02-Feb-2025 Expiration Date 02-Feb-2028 Record ID 67662046 This is to certify that: Heather Baker Has completed the following CITI Program course: Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Human Subjects Research (HSR) (Curriculum Group) IRB Researchers and personnel on IRB protocols (Course Learner Group) 1 - Basic Course (Stage) Under requirements set by: Kansas State University  Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative 101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US www.citiprogram.org Generated on 02-Feb-2025. Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/7w12bfc24-29eb-4ec3-86a6-33c10b0402f3-67662046	 Completion Date 02-Feb-2025 Expiration Date 02-Feb-2028 Record ID 67662047 This is to certify that: Heather Baker Has completed the following CITI Program course: Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Human Subjects Research (HSR) (Curriculum Group) Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools (Course Learner Group) 1 - Basic Course (Stage) Under requirements set by: Kansas State University  Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative 101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US www.citiprogram.org Generated on 02-Feb-2025. Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/7w333ec8f2-57f6-48b5-8350-b79bcf9a9385-67662047
 Completion Date 02-Feb-2025 Expiration Date 02-Feb-2028 Record ID 67662048 This is to certify that: Heather Baker Has completed the following CITI Program course: Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) (Curriculum Group) Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) (Course Learner Group) 1 - Basic Course (Stage) Under requirements set by: Kansas State University  Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative 101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US www.citiprogram.org Generated on 02-Feb-2025. Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/7w4a49db14-1b1c-45e0-ac28-87a8c92f33ef-67662048	 Completion Date 02-Feb-2025 Expiration Date 02-Feb-2028 Record ID 67662049 This is to certify that: Heather Baker Has completed the following CITI Program course: Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Curriculum Group) Social & Behavioral Research (Course Learner Group) 1 - Basic Course (Stage) Under requirements set by: Kansas State University  Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative 101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US www.citiprogram.org Generated on 02-Feb-2025. Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/7w6268cfb5-ca53-4d7e-ace0-527b0d826a93-67662049

Appendix Figure K. 2. IRB approval letter



Office of Research Integrity,
Compliance and Security

TO: Frederick Burrack
Music, Theatre, & Dance
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number IRB-13361

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 11/04/2025

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Navigating the Funding Process: A Qualitative Study of Perspectives of Instrumental Music Educators from Title 1 Schools."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 11/04/2025

EXPIRATION DATE: 11/03/2028

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

No more than minimal risk to subjects

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 11/04/2025 3:50 PM ET

Note: The title of the study changed during the research process. The study described here is the same as the research reported in this dissertation.

Appendix L – Reflexive Journal Summary

Appendix Figure L. 1. Summary of process-based and in-the-moment reflections

P-#	Process Based & In the Moment Reflections from the Data Collection and Analysis Phases
P1	- California HS Band/Orchestra, 13 years - Notes summary: - Stress, personal spending, rebuilding - Significant personal financial contribution - Stress: Burnout, TMJ, mental health - Struggles: Transparency, policy (Williams Act, Prop 28), processes - Reflective thoughts: - Community engagement emerges as a powerful item - Opened up about the stresses and hardships of switching states, licensure training, and other PD, but what types of PD are being offered? - Depth from vulnerability: how much leverage can be used to advocate for change? - Policy and legal frameworks are heavily shaping so many of the daily routines and requirements for the job. How can you plan to teach or what to teach if your entire time is spent trying to get resources situated, especially for prop 28? - How much legal context should be captured? It impacts the process, but the focus is on coping strategies, and the other states don't have these regulations. - When mental health strategies are mentioned, how much probing is acceptable? How can I encourage candidness in sensitive interviews? Responses should support and offer sensitivity to the participant and not breeze over the information that was shared to move onward. - Try not to romanticize burnout. - Strive for a balance of emotional relevance and practical advice that can be useful.
P2	- Illinois rural, very stable/successful, union roles, innovative funding (solar/wind farms) - Notes summary: - Long tenured and highly experienced - Union involvement and policy leadership, educational leadership degree - Strong focus on transparency, planning, and boundary-setting - Presents PD sessions, mentors, emotionally reflects regularly - Clear, structured processes - Including those with lots of experience and diverse roles could reveal different strategies and perspectives. - Success doesn't mean the absence of challenges or struggles... unseen challenges? - Optimism and strategies seem to be contagious. They bring hope and possibility. How to manage this without glossing over struggles? - Those who are skilled or very knowledgeable have clearer interviews with thoughts that are more linear and focused. Does this make it less raw? Rehearsed because they are used to presentation? - Creative was of adaptation offer uniquely or necessity driven solutions. Could be beneficial to others. - Am I unconsciously favoring certain stories or personalities based on my own background and biases? - Boundary-setting strategies are worth tracking. Do I see patterns of these among more resilient educators? - Research aim: emotional system change or actionable solutions? Are both too big to manage? - Working for a balance between emotional resonance and practical advice will be most impactful.
P3	- Rural North Dakota, wears multiple hats (teacher, principal, superintendent) - School closing. Minimal resources - Notes summary: - Multiple administrative and teaching roles - School closure, resource scarcity, informal budgeting - Community involvement (Lions Club, local grants) - Stress, therapy, personal boundaries - Grant writing, necessity-driven adaptation - Understanding of multiple dimensions of the funding process may provide a unique perspective with diverse strategies. - Program size, community context, and demographics all shape the interaction... am I representing enough perspectives? - The first three participants are quite open on hardships and stress. They are honest and revealing.

	Clarifying questions on the “clawback” policy... how much of legal policy should be captured within this framework? Mentioning it? Or focusing on the strategies that were used to deal with the hardship? Every state will have different legal policy. Getting into the weeds doesn’t seem the most relevant direction.
P4	- Texas, urban, no district funding, total reliance on fundraising, mental health, outside gigs - Notes summary: - No district funding, all fundraising (Vertical Raise, donation-based) - No booster, self-reliance, prefers no admin involvement - Mental health, work-life stress, coping through peer support - School/district inequity, frustration at lack of transparency - High emotion brings risk of disillusionment; am I capturing hope or just frustration? - Practical barriers like data availability and school responsiveness may shape my final sample. - Lacking small school voices in the mix. - A lack of community involvement heavily impacts program sustainability and morale. - One large fundraiser --- educators experiencing success → established routines for managing budgets. Should any focus be on best practices as a strategy or solution? So many of the systems being put into place are built through planning and preparation and being used as a coping strategy.
P5	- Texas rural, rebuilding program, boosters, advocacy, personal spending, some funding improvement - Notes summary: - Transition from underfunded to stable, still limited - Heavily reliant on boosters, parent advocacy - Personal financial contributions - School board involvement - Navigating district vs booster funding - Community support, but also frustration with transparency and admin - The comparison between struggling and successful Title I programs reveals practical strategies and emotional insight. - Relationships with administration are pivotal--- should I include inquire on thoughts about administration turnover or support? I experienced administrative team turnover every year for 11 years. New initiatives created a new learning curve every year. - Is my interest in the perspective of an educator/administrator solely on my own bias of trying to understand and favor that interest? What legitimate strategies and information can I capture from this perspective?
P6	- California, urban/suburban, deeply inequitable district, Prop 28, union action, emotional toll - Notes summary: - Severe funding inequity, mismanagement, lawsuits, union strikes - Educator worked with another teacher to create the budget for the whole school - Emotional/mental health toll, financial burden - Lack of transparency, policy confusion - Strong advocacy, focus on equity, personal resilience for engaging - Needs for systemic reform - Can I leverage these issues to advocate for change? - High emotional investment – much frustration – wondering about hope vs frustration. - Policy shaping again – Williams Act and Prop 28 are very integrated in the shaping of the funding process. - Clarifying questions were asked on the audit process and community demographics. - Very rich neighborhood, counted by property tax changes that leave the school system with little funding. This is great for local residents and affordability in an expensive real-estate community.
P7	- Alabama, early-career, very rural, booster-funded, hands-on fundraising, faith as coping - Notes summary: - All fundraising/booster funded, emphasis on a hands-on approach - Significant personal instrument donations - Strong personal values/faith as resilience for engaging - Administrative support, but local resource limits - Focus on hands-on, work-based activities for students - This is the first mention of faith-based coping mechanisms. I’m wondering how to appropriately place it within the coding framework. It isn’t entirely relational, but it provides the opposite of isolation. A feeling of being supported and not alone... It doesn’t fit in accomplishments. Hopeful isn’t exactly right either as it is an

	adaptation or practice that is put into place and cultivated in the same way as relational, but it is self-maintained. I'm giving the faith-based code its own category for right now. • Including newer educators along with experienced directors allows for a balance. Can show how challenges evolve over time? The situations are so different, but the problems are similar. • Clarifying questions about program debt, parental involvement, and administrative relationships
P8	• Illinois large suburb, long-term growth, district bureaucracy, advocacy, construction/expansion, burnout • Notes summary: ○ Long-term program growth, changing demographics ○ Administrative, parent, and community advocacy ○ Navigating district bureaucracy, funding rotations ○ Emotional fatigue, burnout, need for visibility/support ○ Parent group/booster involvement • Am I overlooking unseen challenges in programs that are now successful? It's easy to see structure and systems put in place and assume they were easily managed. I am curious about the process of implementation and the struggles that were involved in that experience. • This program is a success story, but I want to be careful of my own bias. Am I favoring certain stories, personalities, or outcomes based on my own ideas of success?